

Solano

THE CROSSROADS COUNTY

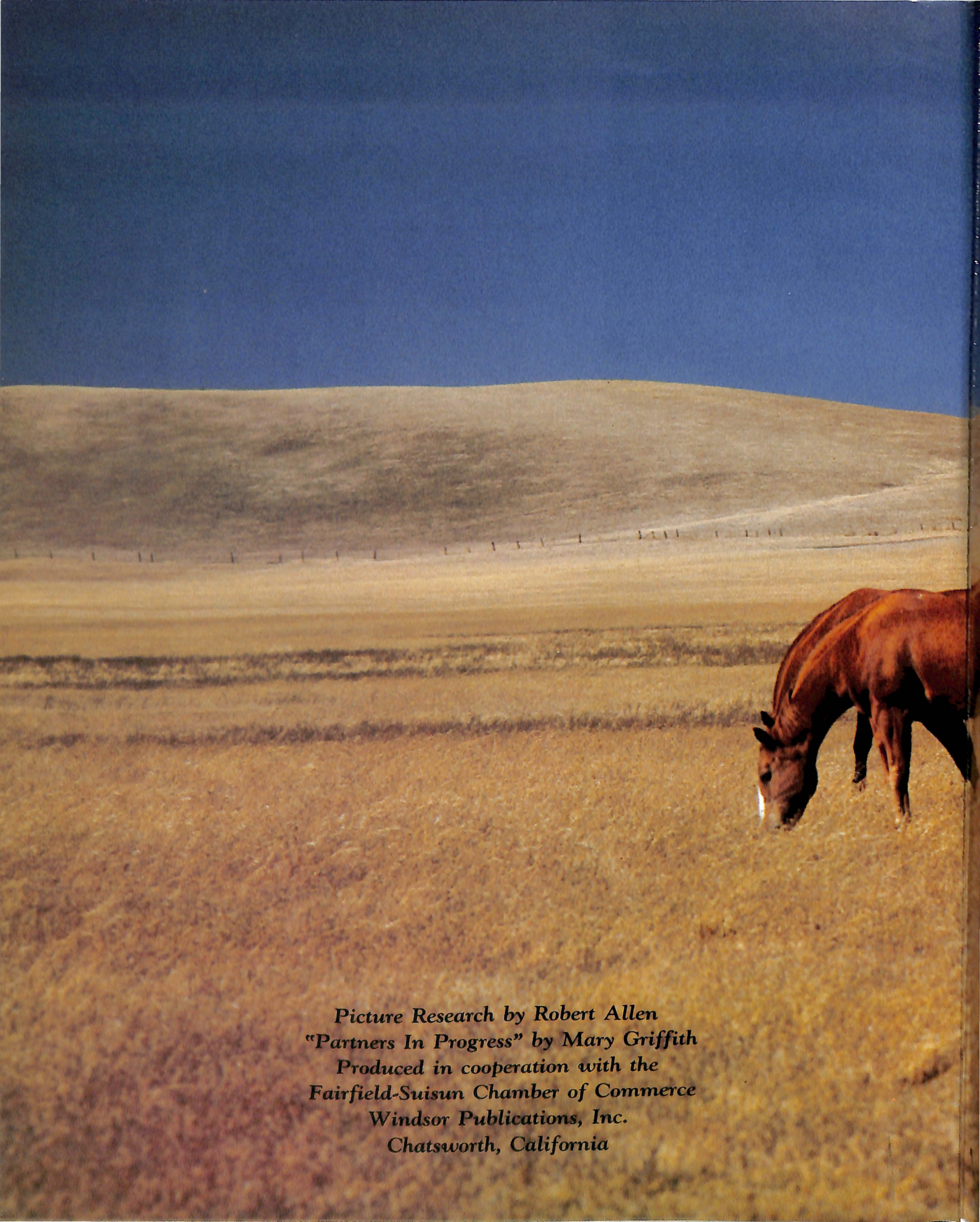
an illustrated history

by Frank L. Keegan



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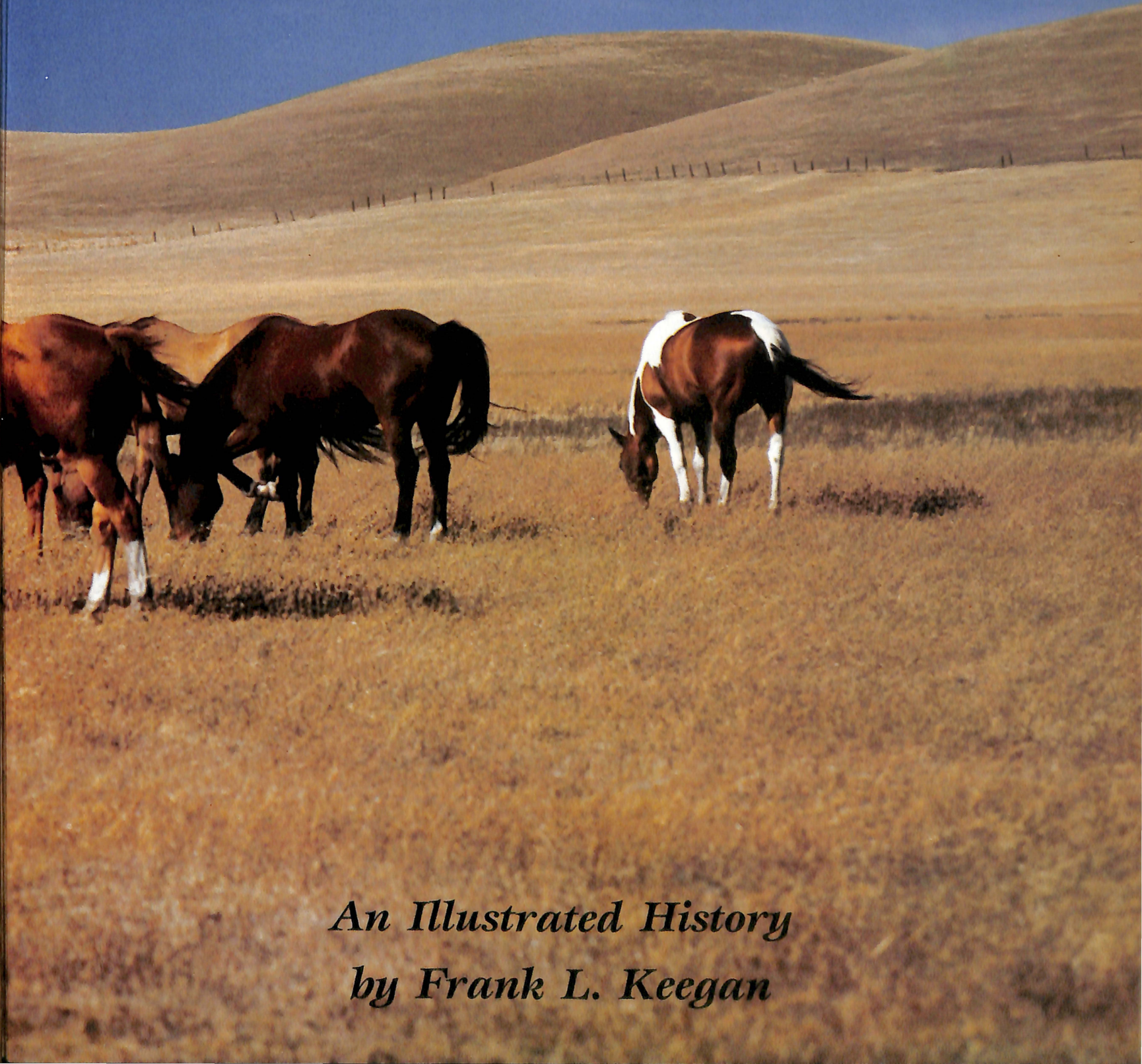
SOLANO COUNTY



*Picture Research by Robert Allen
"Partners In Progress" by Mary Griffith
Produced in cooperation with the
Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce
Windsor Publications, Inc.
Chatsworth, California*

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An Illustrated History
by Frank L. Keegan

Windsor Publications, Inc.—History Books Division

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Frontispiece: The gentle, rolling topography of the Suisun Slough off Grizzly Road forms the background for this peaceful scene. Photo by Norman Prince

Right: The Baldwin Barn in Rockville was built of volcanic stone which hardened after being cut. Note the chisel marks where the stone was faced. Courtesy, Robert Allen Photography

*To Ernest D. Wichels,
whose newspaper columns
have kept the history of
Solano County alive in
the hearts and minds of
so many for so long.*





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PREFACE

If the history of Spanish California begins in the south, the history of Yankee California begins in the north. It is in northern California where the

first state capitals were established, where the great bay and seaport of San Francisco lie, and where the Gold Rush transformed both the natural and the human landscape of California. And in those early times, it was the county of Solano which was at the very center of the new, young and vigorous state.

Indeed, Solano County was so important that it is the only county in California which may claim two of its cities as state capitols, Vallejo and Benicia.

The county itself is almost 900 square miles in size and outlined by natural boundaries, mostly water ones. On the east, it is the Sacramento River; on the south, San Pablo and Suisun bays and the Carquinez Strait; on the west by the Howell and Vaca mountains; to the north, Putah Creek. The mountainous frontier to the west contains picturesque names like the "Twin Sisters," Mount Vaca and the English Hills.

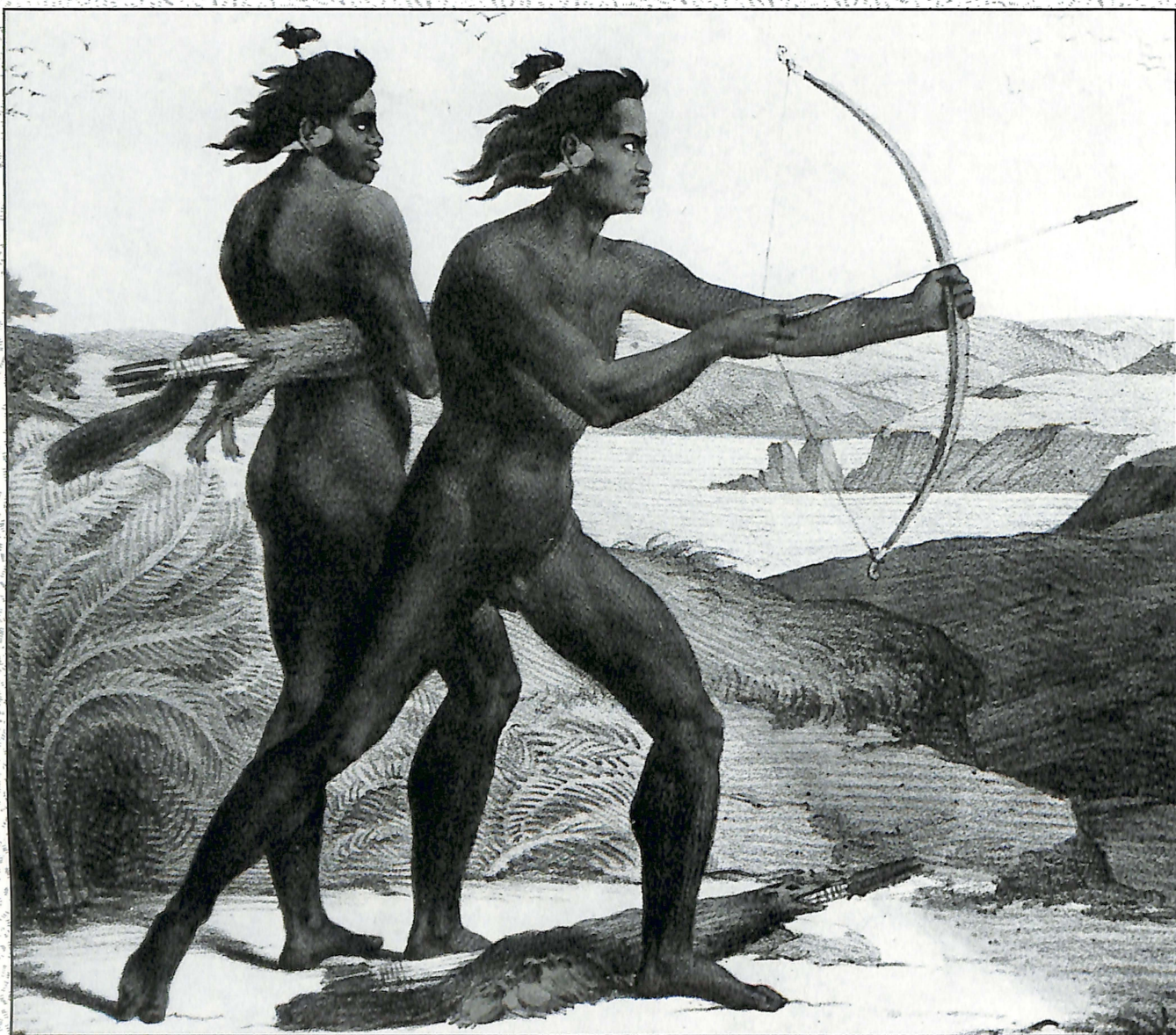
The richness and variety of Solano's cities and towns defy imagination. Vallejo and Benicia, with nearby Mare Island, are on waterfront sites, while Fairfield, Suisun City and Vacaville lie inland served by highway transport. In the north Dixon might as easily be located on the flat lands of Kansas while Rio Vista to the east could be a river town on the Mississippi Delta depicted by Mark Twain.

The diversity of the cities and towns is matched by the woven tapestry of history itself, redolent in the names of "Solano" and "Suisun" for its first inhabitants, the Patwin Indians; by "Vallejo," "Benicia," "Vacaville" and "Rio Vista" for Spanish and Mexican forbearers; by "Fairfield" and "Dixon" for sturdy Yankee merchants and pioneers.

Whether by land or water, those who traversed Solano County used it as pathway, crossroad and water route in their search for land and empire, gold and adventure, industry and ambition, travel and leisure. In the earliest days, horse trails connected it with the Russian Fort at Ross on California's coast through the Franciscan mission at Sonoma, the last of the missions established by Fray Junipero Serra. It was a vital link to reach John Sutter's New Helvetia, today's Sacramento. The Pony Express ran through Solano County and John Charles Fremont marched many times across its untamed frontier. It was the connecting point between San Francisco and all points north, as it was the trail for the gold seekers of 1849. In 1869, it was the western terminus of the nation's first transcontinental railroad just as, today, Travis Air Force Base is the last western stop for U.S. military travel to the Pacific and the Far East.

In the pages which follow, we will tell the story of Solano County, its first inhabitants and settlers, its rich political history, and its growth and development as an agricultural and industrial region which today rivals any of the Bay Area counties for the quality of its suburban living and its vital business centers. We will tell the story of "The Crossroads County" whose paths beckon today as they did yesterday, a county which invites a visit which can easily, as it did for so many, turn into a permanent home and a promising future.

Opposite page: Tuna cactus was brought to Solano County by the early Spanish-Californians. The young cactus pads are still collected and eaten, while the sweet tunas (fruits) are made into preserves and candy. Photo by Robert Allen



The earliest residents of Northern California, represented by such tribes as the Tcho-lovoni, the Miwok, and the Patwins, were noted for their hunting ability. Courtesy, Bancroft Library

I THE CLASH OF TWO CULTURES

The first inhabitants of Solano County, the Indians, dwelt for thousands of years before the coming of the Europeans, but their presence today has all but vanished. Even in their own time, they trod lightly upon the land, respecting the seasons and the bounty of the earth.

They were known as Patwins, part of a larger cultural and linguistic family, the Wintuns. Those dwelling in the area known as Solano County were the Southern Patwin, and they in turn were divided into tribelets—the Ululatos (Vacaville), Labaytos (Putah Creek), Malacas (Lagoon Valley), Tolenas (Upper Suisun Valley), and Suisunes (Suisun Plain). The actual number of Southern Patwins will probably never be known, but the most recent modern estimates place them in the range of three to five thousand.

They were both hunters and gatherers and secured only what was required for life. In catching salmon or slaying deer, they allowed survivors to remain in the wild state, as a pledge of future bounty. No land was cultivated and crops and planting were unknown, yet they learned how to leach the acorn to make it palatable as meal or as flour for bread, and they stored the fall harvest of acorns, grasses, and bulbs in granaries for use in the winter.

The Southern Patwins were adept at stalking deer, antelope, elk, and bear, sometimes using the skin and antlers of the deer to move silently into a herd for a quick kill with bow and arrow. On the water, they were swift in their canoes made of tule rushes, which rode upon the surface like a soft mattress.

From the canoes they speared salmon or flushed wild ducks and geese into nets strung between tule reeds in narrow waterways or sloughs. One of the early observers of the Patwins, Stephen Powers, noted in 1871 that they were skilled in setting up duck decoys, which were "colored and very life-like," to attract low-flying fowl.

The Southern Patwin congregated in villages of about 100 people that contained dwellings or lodges constructed for two or more families. Excavating an area resembling an elliptical bowl with a flattened floor, they reinforced the sides with wooden boughs, then constructed conical huts of tule thatch and wood beams overhead, with an escape hatch for smoke in the center.

For social gatherings, two additional buildings were constructed: the *temescal*, or sweathouse, for the men, and a house for women in menstruation or childbirth. The sweathouses were up to 50 feet in length, and the men would so-

Right: These local Indians were sketched by Louis Choris who was an artist on the La Perouse French hydrographical expedition which visited the Mission San Francisco de Asis in 1816. The Indians were neophytes at the mission where they received training in religion and a new way of life. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



Below: This drawing from 1816 depicts Bay Area natives utilizing a tule-reed canoe to navigate the waters of the San Francisco Bay. These craft were popular among many area tribes including the Patwins. Courtesy, Bancroft Library



cialize within them. After profuse sweating induced by a roaring fire, they would emerge from the temescal to throw themselves into a cold stream nearby. Sometimes a third structure was added, a house for ceremonial dancing.

The Southern Patwin were part of the Kuksu religion, which allowed secret societies, each of which was marked by a distinctive dance and ritual. One such ritual was the initiation of boys into manhood. Another was the "ghost dance," which they regarded as a powerful and dangerous ceremony.

The relations between Patwin tribelets were sometimes hostile, caused by one group poaching on the land of another. In

a war, no prisoners were taken, and women could be killed as often as men. Sometimes the chiefs of each tribelet would negotiate the conditions for peace, which was consummated with ritual dancing and an exchange of gifts.

If the relations between tribelets were sometimes warlike, the clashes were between neighbors, between elements of common culture. When the clash began with the Spanish, however, the battle was between different cultures, and the results were radically different.

The first Spanish presence in Solano County, however, was not violent, but peaceful. In the summer of 1775 the vessel *San Carlos*, under the young Spanish captain, Juan Bautista de Ayala, entered San Francisco Bay, anchoring near Angel Island in what is today called Ayala's Cove. For several weeks in his longboat the pilot of the *San Carlos*, Jose de Canizares, explored and charted the bay and its tributaries. On the Feast of the Assumption, August 15, 1775, Canizares and his men discovered a sheltered harbor known today as Benicia's Southampton Bay on Carquinez Strait; they named it Assumption Harbor. Jose de Canizares was the first European to enter Solano County.

When the American Revolution began one year later, in 1776, the Mission San Francisco de Asis (Mission Dolores) was founded, and with it a presidio for the Span-

ish soldiers. In 1777 a pueblo was established at San Jose and a mission at Santa Clara de Asís; in 1797 the Mission San Jose de Guadalupe was erected, and in 1817 the Mission San Rafael Arcángel in Marin County was founded.

But no mission was ever established without the presence of the Spanish military, both to protect the mission from without and to maintain order within. And the Spanish soldier, mounted on his horse and skillful in the use of firearms, was a powerful adversary.

The crown of Spain was devoted to the twin purpose of political rule and religious conversion. The Spanish came to colonize, to remain as permanent settlers in the new lands, and their plan for pacification included the missions. The Indians were taught agricultural skills and Christian doctrine, and their life was regimented within the mission walls. Not all the Indians preferred to abandon their native ways, and many escaped. It was with the capture of the *cimarrones*, or escaped neophytes, that the Spanish presence was first felt in what we now know as Solano County.

The area that would become Solano County was distant from the missions at Santa Clara and San Francisco, yet its very remoteness was favored by those recent Indian converts who sought freedom and a return to their natural ways. Moreover, the common practice of stealing horses enabled them to be even more successful in evading their Spanish conquerors. In the early years of the 1800s the Suisun Indians had developed a small cavalry that launched persistent attacks on various mission outposts, and they could no longer be ignored by the Spanish.

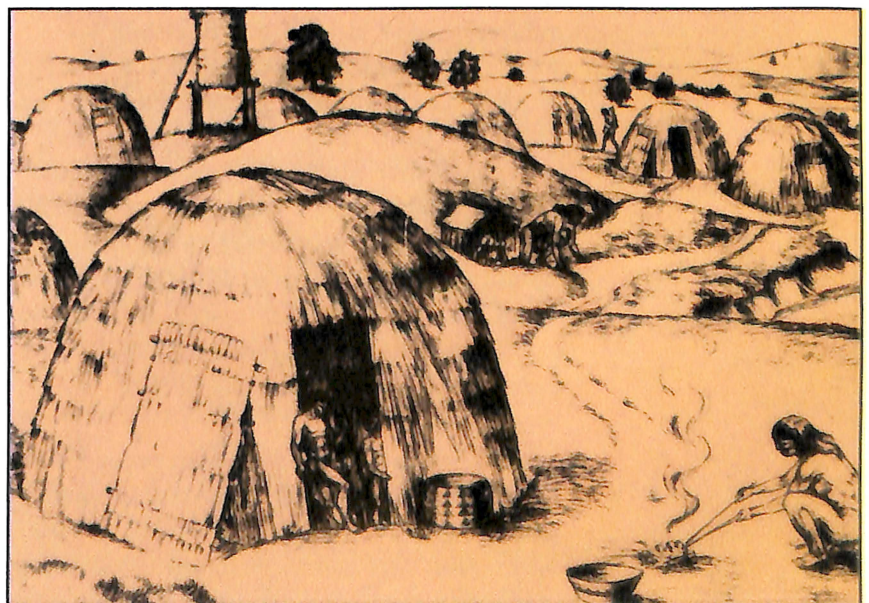
In May 1810 Gabriel Moraga—who has been called Spanish California's greatest pathfinder—crossed the Carquinez Strait to punish the hostile Indians. Using both tule canoes and a boat for the horses, Moraga and 17 soldiers from the San Francisco presidio marched against the Suisun Indians. The

Spanish were met by 125 warriors, and a fierce battle ensued. The Indians were driven into three huts or dwellings, and those in the first two were killed, while those in the third preferred to die within after setting it afire. It was reported that "The valiant Indians died enveloped in flames, rather than surrender." For his success, Moraga was promoted to brevet lieutenant.

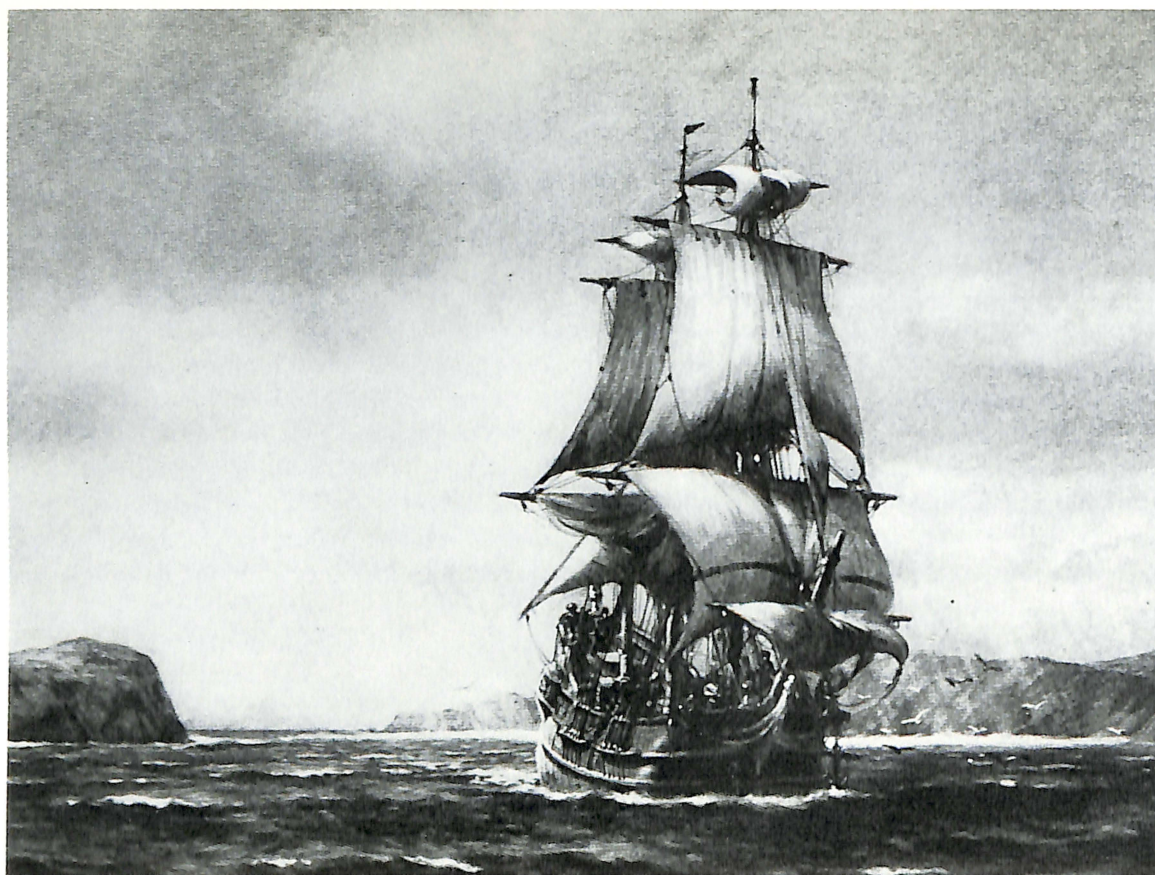
Seven years later, in 1817, Jose Arguello, the commander of the San Francisco presidio, sent Lt. Jose Antonio Sanchez and a small expedition across the Carquinez Strait to subdue rebellious Indians once again. Met at Benicia by a force of Indian warriors under Chief Malica, Sanchez and his men drove them back in retreat toward present-day Suisun City. Once again, the Indians chose to set their houses afire and die within rather than surrender to the superior force.

These two successful Spanish expeditions did much to subdue the various tribes of the Southern Patwin Indians, and the best proof is to be found in the number of Patwins enrolled in the missions. The first mention of Suisun Indians in a baptismal record is found in the 1807

The dwellings of the Southern Patwin Indians consisted of inverted frameworks of willow branches covered over with tules. The earthen lodge in the center of the village was a sweat-house. An acorn storehouse stands in the upper left of the picture. Courtesy, Peña Adobe Museum



On August 5, 1775,
 Juan Bautista de
 Ayala, aboard his ves-
 sel the San Carlos, en-
 tered the San
 Francisco Bay success-
 fully extending
 Spain's colonization
 to Northern Califor-
 nia. Drawing by Wal-
 ter Francis. Courtesy,
 Bancroft Library



San Jose mission records. By 1810 and 1811 a far larger number is recorded. Other tribelets, like the Tolenas, Malacas, and Ululatos, appear in the San Francisco and San Jose mission baptismal records of 1816, 1817, and 1819. One writer has noted that 4,000 Southern Patwins were ultimately listed in the mission registers out of a population of 5,000 before the Spanish came.

The purpose of the Spanish forays was not only to recruit new converts and subdue hostile Indians but to search for new mission territory and to further the work of colonization. Another reason for expansion was to prevent the Russians from moving farther south from their large outpost in Sitka, Alaska. By 1812 they had already penetrated to present-day Sonoma County, erecting a fort at Ross along the coast. The Spanish were uneasy about further encroachments that would give the Russians access to the great bay at San Francisco.

It was a young Franciscan named Father Jose Altimira who became convinced that neither Mission San Francisco de Asís or Mission San Rafael Arcángel were adequate to realize both the lofty spiritual aims

of the missions and the need for a northern frontier, so he began a search for a new mission location in early 1823. Altimira traveled throughout the present-day counties of Sonoma, Napa, and Solano looking for a site. He found it at Sonoma, and on August 23, 1823, the last and most northern of the Franciscan missions was dedicated—Mission San Francisco de Solano, the twenty-first in a long line extending from San Diego in the south.

It was this mission that would exercise great influence upon the development of Solano County, for it was here, some years later, that General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo would build a presidio and effectively rule what was called the *frontera del norte*. It was also the mission at Sonoma that was the place where the young Indian, Sem-Yeto, was baptized in 1824. He was given the name Francisco Solano. Vallejo and Solano are often mentioned together in the history of Solano County, and indeed their friendship and alliance were critical in the early development of the county.

It is important to remember that Mexico declared its independence from Spain in 1821, and all the lands of California fell under the rule of the Mexicans, whose capital

in California was Monterey. Those who were of Spanish lineage yet born in California were known as *Californios*, and chief among them in these times was Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo.

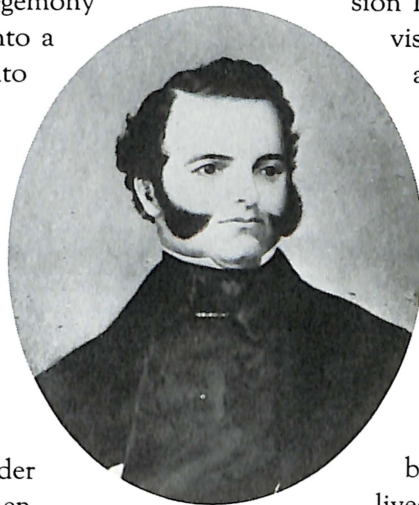
Vallejo was the most powerful civil and military figure in northern California during the period of Mexican hegemony in California. He was born into a family that had deep roots into Spain's history. One of his forebears was Admiral Alonzo Vallejo, who commanded the ship that carried Christopher Columbus back to Spain in chains from the New World, and his father, Ignacio Vallejo, was a member of the military guard of Father Junipero Serra, the founder of the California missions when he established the first mission at San Diego in 1769.

Vallejo was born in 1808 at the Monterey presidio where his father was stationed, and he received a Franciscan education along with learning the practical arts and skills of a young Spanish nobleman, like horsemanship and the use of firearms. He was fond of study and throughout his life he maintained an excellent library, reading deeply in the history of ancient Rome and Greece.

In contrast, the figure of Sem-Yeto, later baptized Francisco Solano, is a good example of the cultural clash between the Patwin Indians and the Spanish conquerors. In his life he was influenced both by the instincts of his pagan past and by the culture of the Europeans.

According to one account, he was among a small number of Indians captured by Lieutenant Jose Antonio Sanchez and his men in the conflicts at Benicia and at Suisun City in 1817. Whatever his origins, the baptismal records of the new Mission San Francisco Solano in Sonoma state that he

was baptized there in 1824. Thereafter he is reported as living both at Sonoma, and in Suisun Valley, where a small outpost was maintained enabling the missionaries from Sonoma to proselytize throughout Solano County. Vallejo himself reported that he saw Solano at San Francisco in 1829 at Mission Dolores, after which he supervised mission Indians in and around Suisun Valley until 1835.



General Mariano Vallejo commanded California's northernmost frontier during Mexican rule. He was recognized as a capable leader and skilled tactician. Courtesy, Bancroft Library

There are, however, other accounts of Solano that picture him as the huge Suisun chief who was a captain in the Mexican Army, the subcommander under Vallejo in the subjugation of neighboring Indians who would not be regimented by life in the missions and who lived as marauders upon neophyte Indians, early settlers, and mission outposts. And Solano was huge, towering six feet, seven inches in height. His strength was great, and it is easy to see why he became a leader among the Suisunes. In alliance with Mariano Vallejo, Solano led the Indian detachments not only to defeat hostile tribes but also to capture them to work the fields under Mexican supervision.

One account is particularly revealing. It is by an early American settler, Charles Brown, who was part of an 1835 expedition with General Vallejo and his brother Salvador, and 60 armed *Californios*, 22 foreigners, and 200 Indian war auxiliaries. The expedition went 200 miles north from Sonoma to attack and capture Indians who had been stealing livestock from the Sonoma Mission. According to Brown, 200 to 300 Indians were killed and about 100 taken prisoner. Brown notes:

The worst thing I ever saw in my life was done then by Solano, the head Indian of Vallejo. There was a woman of the ranchera (Indian village) who had a child slung on her back and

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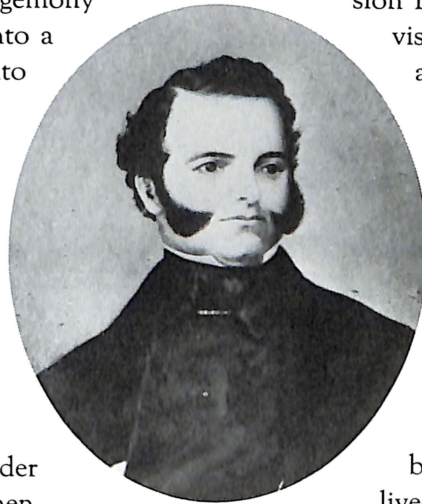
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General Vallejo is seen here in a very rare image with the woman considered by many historians to be Ysadora, wife of Chief Solano. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

was far advanced in pregnancy. Solano first lanced the child on the back and then lanced the woman, ripping the belly open and pulling the phoetas [sic] out. The villainy of the act so maddened me that I was at the point of shooting Solano when Lt. Vallejo stopped me, saying that Solano was his best friend. As it was I was fortunate in not having killed Solano for he, at a later hour saved my life when I was badly wounded.

Brown went on to note that the captured Indians were then distributed among the various mission ranchos, including those owned by Vallejo himself both at Sonoma and at Petaluma where acres of wheat were raised.

The various accounts of Solano may seem contradictory, but that reflects the change occurring in the native way of life during the period of waning Indian culture and the emergence of Spanish and Mexican political and military power in the region. Indeed, one reason for the relative peace on the northern frontier was the strategy of General Vallejo in pitting Indians against one another. Vallejo was following the an-



General Mariano Vallejo is seen here with several of his daughters sometime around 1860, after California's admission to the Union. Courtesy, Bancroft Library



cient Roman policy of "divide and conquer" when he sought out the friendship of Solano and designated him "Chief" and even "Great Chief." And the policy not only served Vallejo's purpose but also that of Solano, whose enemies were the Satiyomis. With the aid of Vallejo and his soldiers, he drove them from the land

General Vallejo rewarded Chief Solano for his service and presented him with many honors, including an honor guard of 44 Indians, all fully uniformed. He was given a handsome horse, a saddle mounted in silver, a silver watch, and fancy boots. Finally, in 1837, Vallejo presented Chief Solano with something better than fine horses and jewelry when he awarded him the great Suisun Rancho, comprising 17,752 acres, "for his own personal benefit and that of his family."

Vallejo's power to confer land came to him as a result of the Secularization Act passed in Mexico City in 1833. The act was implemented in 1834 by the Mexican Governor Figueroa, who decreed that the mission properties were to be distributed in portions: half to the Indians and half to the

state. In giving the Suisun Rancho to Chief Solano, Vallejo was at once rewarding his old friend and formally fulfilling the governor's order—not an unusual transaction in those times. However, Vallejo bought the lands back from Solano for \$1,000 in 1842, five years after he had granted him the rancho.

The last years of Chief Solano's life are obscure. He seems to have left the region in 1846, returning in 1850 to a heart-felt reunion with Mariano Vallejo in Sonoma. Thereafter he is reported at the Suisun Rancho, then operated by Vallejo with an Indian manager named Jesus Molino. An early pioneer, Samuel Martin, with a party of Americans discovered him fatally ill at the rancho in 1850 and notes his passing. The precise place of his burial is uncertain, but legend has it that he was laid to rest near Rockville, perhaps on the very site of today's Solano Community College.

The fate of Chief Solano is not typical of the Southern Patwin Indians, who were disbursed in many directions after the coming of the Spanish, either as mission Indians, as defectors, or simply by leaving the area to head north and so remain in their native state. Many simply stayed on the land working the ranchos for the *Californios*. But whatever the outcome of an individual Indian in these tumultuous times, their habitual way of life was torn asunder and never replaced.

The final tragedy, however, was more sudden and dramatic. In 1837 Mariano Vallejo sent a party north under Corporal Ignacio Miramontes to trade with the Russians at Fort Ross. Members of the party contracted smallpox, which had a devastating effect throughout the county and far beyond. Very few Indians were vaccinated, and as one account puts it, "they died like flies." It was estimated in 1852 that only 200 of the Southern Patwins survived.

Whether the disease had arrived among them or not, the Indians of Solano County would not have survived for long af-

ter the arrival of the Spanish, the Mexicans, and then the Yankees. However, the "Miramontes Epidemic" of 1837 to 1839 greatly accelerated the decline of the Southern Patwins. It is for this reason that the earliest settlers found only a handful of Indians in Solano County when they began to arrive in the 1840s and 1850s.

The clash of the two cultures had, in the small space of 50 years, resulted in the displacement of one people with another.

The end came suddenly for the Southern Patwins, and they remain among us today only in the names they have left and in our fragmentary memory of them.

This bronze statue of Chief Solano stands near the courthouse in Fairfield. The statue, sculpted by William Gordon Huff, was first placed on a hill near Cordelia but was moved, due to vandalism, to its present location. Courtesy, Robert Allen Photography





The ideas of easy fortunes vanished when the argonauts found mining to be tedious work. Few men returned home with any fortune. Courtesy, Benicia State Capitol (State of California)

II SETTLEMENT AND STATEHOOD

The decade of the 1840s would prove to be a turbulent period in the history of California. Though the Mexicans had overthrown Spanish rule in 1821 and were the nominal authority in the new lands, their hold on the territory was tenuous. The distances from Mexico City to northern Cali-

fornia were immense, and the struggling, young republic had vast lands to control. The Mexican governors in California were charged with the duties of administration while also maintaining a semblance of military rule in distant outposts. These burdens were particularly heavy in the northern provinces, in *Alta California*.

Into this unstable situation came the Yankees. They were of two kinds, trappers and settlers. The former were a rough breed of men who had followed in the footsteps of the indomitable Jedediah Smith, who, in 1826, became the first white man to reach California overland. They were solitary hunters who moved westward as the supply of beavers declined. By the 1840s these trappers had found their way into the Sacramento Valley and were setting their traps all along the Delta in the channels and waterways of the Sacramento River.

The second group of Yankees were the settlers who had come overland in wagon trains drawn by horses and mules. They brought with them their wives, children, and household belongings, and were prepared to stake out a new life in the West. In the year 1845, 420 foreigners, mostly Yankees, had entered California.

As these immigrants traveled westward, they saw more and more of a vast and beautiful land needing development. They were convinced that they, rather than the Mexicans, were to be its developers. To the Yankees, the *Californios* (those of Spanish descent born in California) seemed indolent and lacking in the industry to make the land productive. The use of the vast ranges exclusively for raising cattle seemed to them a waste, for it ignored California's vast agricultural possibilities. They were animated further by a strong conviction about the United States. As they moved from east to west, they envisioned but a single nation from sea to sea. They believed that the land they traversed would one day be theirs, that it was the right of Americans to own the single territory between the oceans. This was the doctrine of "Manifest Destiny," and it was lodged deep in the heart of every Yankee, whether trapper or settler.

Mountain men, such as Kit Carson and Jim Clyman, were familiar in Solano County back in the 1840s. They were the hunters, trappers, and guides who led the immigrants west. Courtesy, Benicia State Capitol (State of California)



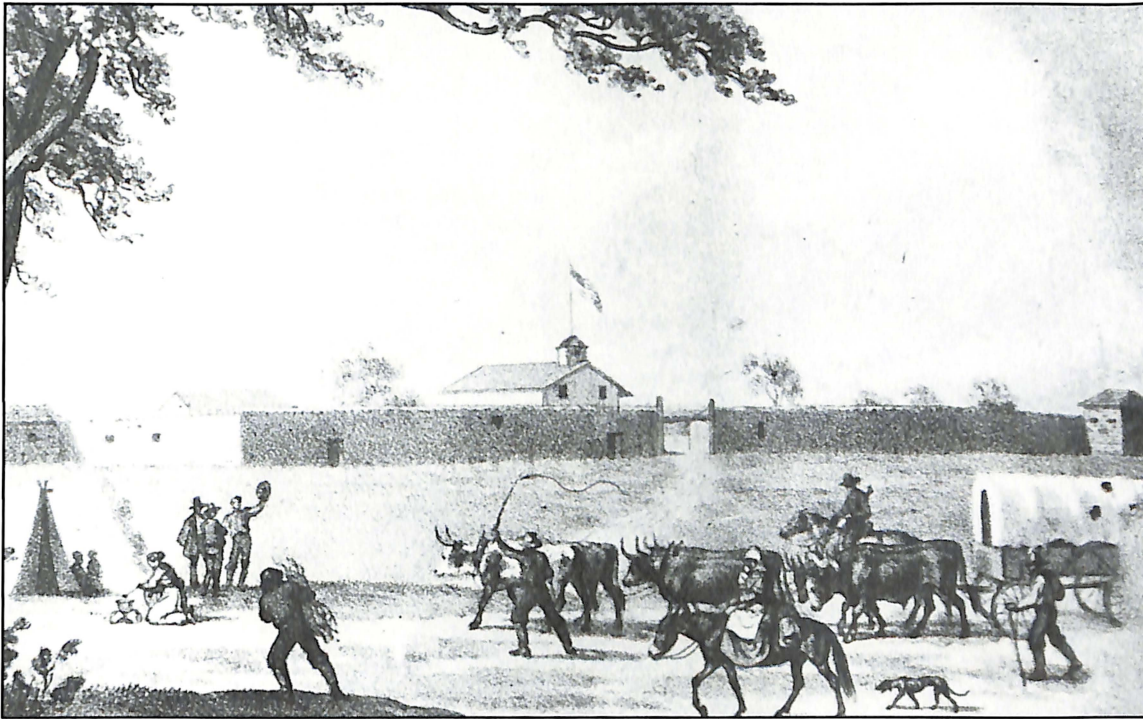
Newspapers in the eastern United States were confidently predicting a future of Manifest Destiny and announcing that the Yankee immigrants were but the first stage in what would be the inevitable acquisition of the western lands by the Americans. For their part, Mexican diplomats were quick to send these notices to Mexico City. As a result, the Mexican government published bulletins throughout the territories that no one could enter California without permission and a legal passport.

It was against this background of tense relations between Mexico and the United States that the first settlers of Solano County came. Interestingly, the first of the Mexican settlers—Jose Francisco Armijo, Juan Manuel Vaca, and Juan Felipe Peña—and the first Yankee settlers—William and John Wolfskill—began their journeys from New Mexico when it was still Mexican territory.

Armijo was a native of New Mexico and a traveling merchant selling hides and brandy. He had visited the Suisun Valley as early as 1835. It was in that year that the full effects of Mexico's Secularization Decree of 1833 were being felt in the northern territories, and it was General Mariano Vallejo who was the administrator in charge of the distribution of lands. In 1839 Armijo applied to Vallejo for a grant, and it was confirmed in 1840 by Governor Juan Bautista Alvarado. Armijo's land was known as the Tolenas Grant, and it stretched across the northern and eastern portions of Suisun Valley. Armijo ran cattle on the land, as did his son Antonio, and they both built adobe houses with the help of the few surviving Indians of the region.

It was probably through Armijo that Manuel Vaca and Felipe Peña learned of the northern lands with their ample water supply, grasslands, and excellent soil, though they had also been in contact with Vallejo as early as 1837.

The Vaca and Peña families were prom-



Immigrants at Sutter's Fort are seen here greeting new arrivals after their 2,000 mile trek from back east. Captain John Sutter was kind and helpful to these new arrivals at his inland empire of New Helvetia. Courtesy, Benicia State Capitol (State of California)

inent in the New Mexico region, and two pueblos there still bear the names of the pioneers, Peña Blanca and Bacaville (the name "Vaca" was sometimes spelled "Baca"). But there were strong reasons for leaving the Southwest. Continual disputes with competing Mexican authorities as well as frequently dangerous encounters with the Comanche and Apache Indians—not to mention the new Republic of Texas, which had declared its independence in 1836 and showed signs of encroaching on New Mexico—caused Vaca and Peña to look northward to the unspoiled and quiet lands of Solano above San Francisco Bay.

In these times Santa Fe, New Mexico, was a major trading center, the terminus of the Santa Fe Trail from Independence, Missouri. It was also the starting point for travel westward on the Old Spanish Trail, which went northwest toward Salt Lake, crossed the Colorado and Green rivers, then turned southwest through Utah across the mountains and through the deserts of Nevada and California to reach Mission San Gabriel and the small pueblo of Los Angeles.

The Vaca and Peña families were part of what historians call the "Workman-Rowland Party," which left Santa Fe in early September 1841 and arrived in California two months later. It was an arduous journey of 1,200 miles riding on horseback with pack mules alongside. When the party arrived in Los Angeles the Mexican authorities were presented with the list of immigrants, which included "J. Manuel Baca and families."

Juan Manuel Vaca was 10 years older than Juan Felipe Peña, who called him *compadre* (godfather), so it was not unusual that Vaca's name alone would appear on the immigrant list. The two families, however, made a large group. Vaca's wife, Maria Dolores Bernal, had died a few years earlier and he was left with eight surviving children. Felipe Peña's wife was named Isabella, and they had six children. Together, the families comprised a party of 17 persons.

After resting from the difficult journey, they moved north of *El Camino Real* (The King's Highway), stopping at various

The Californios had a way of life well suited to their needs.

It was a life built around animal husbandry, not agriculture. Their superb horsemanship was as legendary as their warm hospitality.

Courtesy, Benicia State Capitol (State of California)



missions on the way until they arrived in San Francisco. The historian Wood Young has described the journey:

Nestora Peña (only daughter of Juan Felipe) was told that at age three, she was carried at times by her father on a pillow on his horse, and the cacti was in bloom all across the deserts. This was substantiated by a further family tradition . . . [that] told of Appolonia Vaca, two year old daughter of Juan Manuel, riding in a balanced saddle bag opposite Nestora Peña on a gentle mule. And that, they came from Santa Fe to Mission San Gabriel [Los Angeles] followed the El Camino Real to Sonoma and on to Vaca Valley.

Just a few months later, on June 6, 1842, a land grant issued by General Vallejo was made to "Manuel Baca and the families he brings" for the place that the Indians had called "Lihuaytos," Los Putos Rancho. It was to include 10 Spanish

leagues, a huge area of over 44,000 acres extending from Lagoon Valley just south of Vacaville north almost to Dixon. This provisional grant by Vallejo was confirmed on January 26, 1843, by Mexican Governor Manuel Micheltorena. It was the largest of all land grants in Solano County.

Shortly thereafter, both Vaca and Peña built adobe houses with the aid of Indians loaned to them by Vallejo at Sonoma. The houses were located just southwest of the present city of Vacaville, with Vaca building on the west side of today's Highway 80 and Peña on the east side of the highway, a bit farther south. Peña's adobe house still stands today in Lagoon Valley and is known as State Historical Landmark #534. Family records show that members of the two families sometimes married one another and settled in or near the houses of their fathers.

The first Yankee settlers to Solano County were the Wolfskill brothers, Wil-



Left: Señora Jose Francisco Armijo and her granddaughter are seen here in an 1851 pencil sketch by Nathan Coombs, Sr. Courtesy, Solano College Library Archives

While planning to return to Los Angeles, Wolfskill accidentally met Jacob P. Leese, Vallejo's brother-in-law, who suggested that he be allowed to ask the general. It was a good suggestion, and through Leese, Vallejo agreed to a grant of four square leagues, about 17,000 acres. It was to be called "Rio de Los Putos" and extended on both sides of Putah Creek, in today's Yolo and Solano counties. But Vallejo insisted that the grant be made in the name of William Wolfskill, who had become a Mexican citizen as early as 1830 in New Mexico.

The vast lands that had been deeded to these early settlers were occasionally involved in disputes. When water dried up on his land in 1842, Manuel Vaca allowed

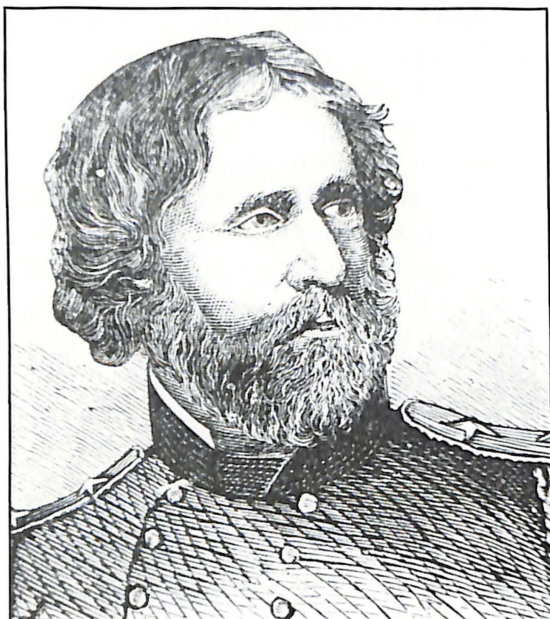
Below: John and William Wolfskill are seen here with their wives in an image from around 1875. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

liam and John, both born in Kentucky of German parents. The older, William, is known as the leader of the "Wolfskill Party of 1830-31," which made the difficult journey on the Old Spanish Trail from Santa Fe to Los Angeles. Others in this party included George C. Yount, who was the pioneer settler of the Napa Valley. Arriving in Los Angeles, William Wolfskill settled down and became a pioneer grower of citrus fruits, especially oranges.

A few years later, his brother John arrived in Los Angeles and worked with William in the development of oranges as a citrus crop and in the growing of grapes for wine. News about the lush lands to the north reached them, and the name of Vallejo as a Mexican *comandante* who was friendly to Americans encouraged the Wolfskills to travel north to Sonoma. On one of the visits in 1840, John approached Vallejo for land but was refused because he was not a Mexican citizen; nonetheless, Vallejo did not discourage him from visiting the new territory. A year later, John Wolfskill tried again and sent an emissary, an Englishman named Mark West, to seek the favor of Vallejo, but he was again refused.



John C. Fremont, "The Pathfinder," was an important figure during the Bear Flag Revolt. It was Fremont who ordered General Vallejo taken from Sonoma by way of Napa, Green Valley, and Rockville and on to Fremont's camp above Sutter's Fort. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



his stock to range on the land of the Wolfskills. When they objected to Vallejo, he sided with Vaca, and John Wolfskill was forced to move his entire herd to Cache Creek for two years. An appeal was made in 1845 to Governor Pio Pico in Los Angeles, and he decided the case in favor of the Wolfskill brothers.

With the dispute settled, John Wolfskill went to Los Angeles to his brother William's farm for figs, pears, English walnuts, and grape cuttings, and began the cultivation of an orchard, a vineyard and several other crops. The Wolfskills were the first of the settlers to show the immense possibilities of agriculture in Solano County.

These minor disputes between Manuel Vaca and John Wolfskill were but the harbingers of much larger conflicts between the Mexicans and the Yankee settlers. The complete story of the war between Mexico and the United States cannot be told here, but the first hostile action of Americans against Mexico—the Bear Flag Revolt—is important because two of its participants, Vallejo and Robert Semple, played a critical role in the early development of Solano County.

It is ironic that the scene for the revolt should be the presidio at Sonoma un-

der the command of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo, for it was he who foresaw that the Mexicans would be unable to hold California against the rising tide of Yankee settlers and trappers who were crossing the borders of California in ever-increasing numbers. Against the claims of European nations like England and France for the prize of California, Vallejo made it clear that he was on the side of the Yankees.

Yet on June 14, 1846, a motley group of Yankee settlers and trappers surrounded Mariano Vallejo's home at Sonoma and took him and his brother Salvador prisoner. The leaders of the abortive and illegal expedition were Ezekiel Merritt, William B. Ide, and a tall, lanky dentist from Kentucky, Robert B. Semple. Vallejo displayed his usual courtesy and good manners by offering brandy to his captors.

This belligerent act is known as the Bear Flag Revolt, and the Yankees were eager to justify their actions. Four days later, they solemnly declared the establishment of the "Bear Flag Republic" and raised a homemade flag depicting a grizzly bear in one corner and a star in the opposite corner.

By this time, however, the prisoners, Mariano and Salvador Vallejo, were being marched to Sutter's Fort, today's Sacramento. On the first night, the Vallejo brothers stayed at the home of Manuel Vaca, where a Mexican rescue party under cover of nightfall headed by Juan Padilla informed Vallejo that a strong force was ready to attack. Again demonstrating his moderation, Vallejo refused to permit the attempt, for he was confident he would be released in Sacramento and did not wish to risk bloodshed and a later retaliation.

The Bear Flag Revolt was the first open encounter between Mexican military forces and the newly arrived Yankee settlers, and yet, because of it, a friendship developed between General Vallejo and one of the Bear Flaggers, Robert B. Semple. When Vallejo was released six weeks later, he rode with Semple back to Sonoma and to-

gether they saw the site of today's Benicia alongside the Carquinez Strait. According to tradition, it was at this time that Semple asked for land abutting the strait, and Vallejo agreed, on condition that it be named after his wife, Francisca Benicia Vallejo.

After the Bear Flag Revolt, events moved swiftly, with Commodore John Drake Sloat and his naval forces capturing the Mexican capital of Monterey and raising the Stars and Stripes there on July 7, 1846. Later that year General Zachary Taylor invaded northern Mexico; in 1847 General Winfield Scott entered Mexico City with a victorious American army, and the Mexicans sued for peace. On February 2, 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed giving to the United States the territories of New Mexico and California, with the exception of Lower California and the state of Texas. Manifest Destiny was no longer a theory, but a fact.

In the following year, California's First Constitutional Convention was held, on September 3, 1849, in Monterey. Among the delegates would be found the names of Mariano Vallejo and the man elected president of the assembly, Robert B. Semple. One year later, on September 9, 1850, President Millard Fillmore signed the Admission Bill and California became the thirty-first state of the Union. But even before formal admission, in February, California's first legislature met in San Jose and created 27 counties, among them Solano County, the name of which was proposed by Vallejo in

recognition of his old Indian friend and ally, Sem-Yeto, Chief Solano of the Suisunes.

The figure of Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo stands at the crossroads of the new county of Solano, looking backward to the Patwin Indians and the Spanish and Mexican occupations of California and forward to the new period of Yankee sovereignty. He would leave his imprint on the future of the county as he had already marked its past.

Yet Vallejo's influence would not match other emerging forces. One of these forces might have been expected, for the Yankee spirit of enterprise and competition was well known, and it could easily become political rivalry as cities each sought to become the state capital. All this was predict-

able, but what was entirely unforeseen was to have the resultant economic and political development occur just after the discovery in California of the most precious metal in the world—gold.

Gold and land now became the twin engines driving the competitive spirit of the Yankees, and nowhere is this better seen than in the rise of Benicia and Vallejo, whose prominence was derived from their favored position beside San

Francisco Bay on the way to the gold country and from their political stature as state capitals. If one searches for the early political history of California, one must begin with southern Solano County.



Kit Carson, a mountain man and scout for Captain John C. Fremont, passed through lower Solano County a number of times, both with Fremont and Ulysses S. Grant. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



*These high ranking of-
ficers of the United
States Army of the
West posed for this pic-
ture in about 1860 at
the Benicia Arsenal.
Courtesy, Vacaville
Heritage Council*

III

THE STATE CAPITALS OF SOLANO COUNTY

On January 24, 1848, just 10 days before the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ending the Mexican-American War, James Wilson Marshall discovered gold on the south fork of the American River about 45 miles northeast of Sutter's Fort in today's Sacramento. That discovery did more to influence the course of California's history than any other single event.

The effects of the discovery have been well described by J.S. Holliday:

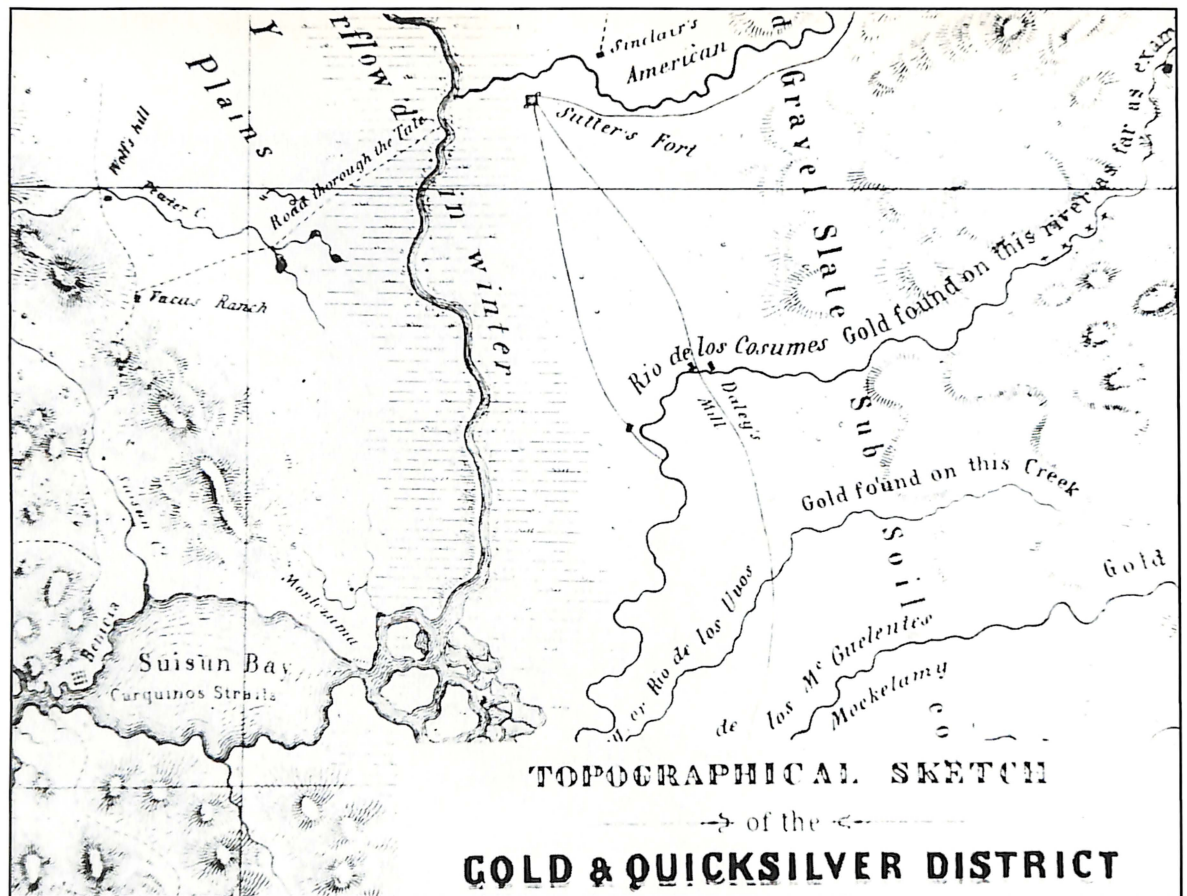
Everything about California would change. In one astonishing year, the place would be transformed from obscurity to world prominence, from an agricultural frontier that attracted 400 settlers in 1848 to a mining frontier that lured 90,000 impatient men in 1849; from a society of neighbors and families to one of strangers and transients; from an ox-cart economy based on hides and tallow to a complex economy based on gold mining; from Catholic to Protestant, from Latin to Anglo-Saxon. The impact of the new California would be profound on the nation it had so recently joined.

In its own way, Solano County would be changed just as radically. The discovery immediately placed Solano on the route to the gold country between San Francisco and Sutter's Fort and made its southern coast the embarkation point for water traffic north. Though many gold seekers traveled overland, many others would travel by water either around the Horn of South America or to Panama and the Isthmus land route, then by sail to San Francisco. The port of call for the gold seekers was San Francisco, and from there the easiest transit north to the mines was by water up San Pablo Bay, through the Carquinez Strait to Suisun Bay and the Sacramento River. As the miners moved through Solano County they sang of their hopes to the tune of "O Susannah, Don't You Cry."

Oh California! Through land of glittering dreams, Where the yellow dust and diamonds, boys, Are found in all thy streams!

One city in Solano County was prepared for the Gold Rush. It was Benicia, which had been founded in 1847 by Robert B. Semple with the aid of Mariano Vallejo and the U.S. consul to Mexico, Thomas Larkin. Semple was

This 1848 topographical map not only documents the discovery of gold but also the land route taken by the Forty-Niners across Solano County. Courtesy, Solano County Historical Society



both an advertising man and a visionary. He was aware that the new city would need investors, and just two months after the Bear Flag Revolt he started California's first newspaper, the *Californian*, which was first published in Monterey on August 15, 1846. The paper was full of advertisements for the new city of Benicia. Later that year Semple received from Vallejo an undivided half interest in a five-mile stretch of land, one mile deep, on the Carquinez Strait, part of the Suscol Rancho which Vallejo had received as a grant in 1844 for a \$5,000 debt owed him by Governor Manuel Micheltorena.

A few months later, the agreement with Vallejo was redrafted to include a new investor, Thomas Larkin. If Vallejo had the land, Larkin had the money and prestige, and Semple the industry and enthusiasm. By 1848, the year gold was discovered, Benicia already had erected 20 buildings, and Semple had started a ferry service to Martinez across Carquinez Strait, taking advantage of the excellent deep water channel off Benicia's shore.

Originally the city was to be named "Francisca" in honor of Vallejo's wife as Robert Semple had promised, but the shrewd al-

calde (mayor) of Yerba Buena across the Bay, Washington Bartlett, issued a proclamation on January 7, 1847, that renamed Yerba Buena "San Francisco." Dismayed but not undaunted, Semple examined more closely the full name of Doña Francisca Maria Felipa Benicia Carrillo de Vallejo, and chose the simple name "Benicia" for his new city, and so it has remained. Francisca herself preferred to be called Doña Benicia.

Benicia may lay claim to many "firsts" in Solano County history, and among the most prominent is its role as the original county seat authorized by California's first legislature in 1850. The first Protestant church built in California was the First Presbyterian Church founded in Benicia by the Reverend Sylvester Woodbridge in 1849. And in that same year, Lieutenant Colonel Silas E. Casey, rejecting San Francisco, established Benicia as the site of the first U.S. arsenal on the Pacific Coast. Two years later it became the headquarters of the U.S. Army in the West. Among those assigned to the Benicia Arsenal and Barracks in the 1850s were William Tecumseh Sherman, who later helped defeat the South in the Civil War by his famous "March to the

The Clock Tower Fortress may still be seen today in Benicia. It was California's first military bastion and storehouse. Built of local sandstone in 1859, its guns commanded Carquinez Strait. This picture was taken about 1870, before the disastrous fire which destroyed the third and fourth stories. Courtesy, Benicia Museum



Sea" from Atlanta to Savannah, and Ulysses S. Grant, later Lincoln's Civil War commander and the eighteenth president of the United States.

Later in his life, General Sherman wrote of Benicia in his memoirs, noting that "Benicia was the best natural site for a commercial city . . . and had half the money and half the labor been bestowed upon it that had been spent on San Francisco, we should this day have a city of palaces on the Carquinez Strait."

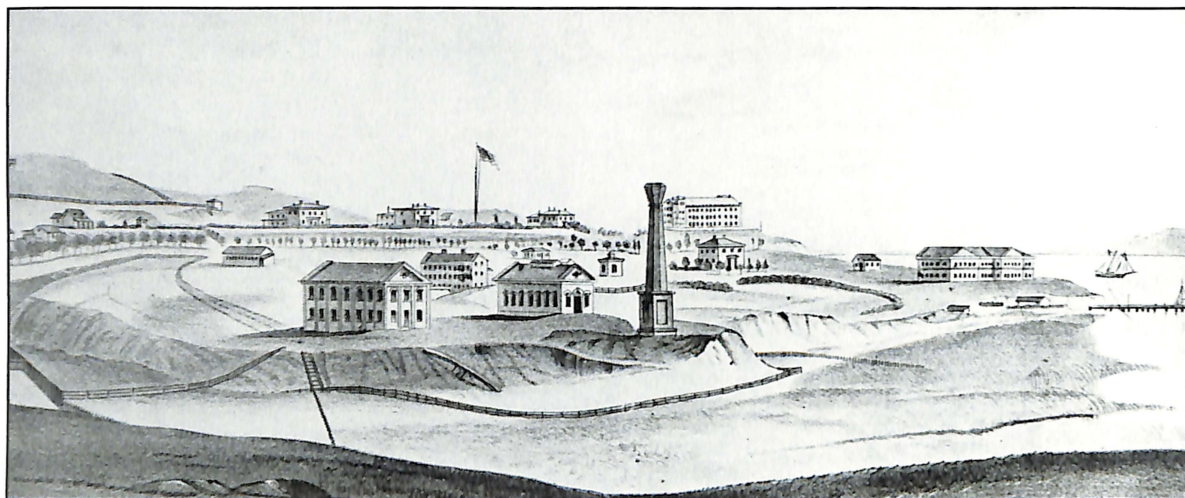
Benicia was also the place where news of the discovery of gold was first disseminated. It seems that one of the workers at Sutter's Fort, John Bennett, had been sent south by John Sutter with gold for deposit at Monterey, and when passing through Benicia, stopped at the popular general store owned by Edward Von Pfister. In a discussion with Semple and Von Pfister about

the important recent discovery of coal near Mount Diablo in Contra Costa County, Bennett threw his hands in the air and said, "Coal! I've got something here which will beat coal and make this the greatest country in the world!" Then he spilled out several ounces of gold nuggets for all to see.

If Benicia may claim to be Solano County's pioneer city, Vallejo may claim to be the first of Solano's cities to be named the capital of California. The honor for this accomplishment belongs to General Vallejo, who was convinced that Vallejo was "the true center of the state, the true center of commerce and the true center of travel."

Moreover, General Vallejo was willing to support the new capital with both lands and money. On April 3, 1850, he presented to the state senate a long memorandum in which he outlined the virtues of the new city and offered to endow it hand-

The U.S. Arsenal at Benicia, Western headquarters for the U.S. Army, was established in 1851. It closed in 1964. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



somely. He proposed to give 156 acres of land facing San Pablo Bay plus the huge sum of \$370,000 for public buildings, including a state capitol building costing \$125,000 as well as a state university, botanical gardens, four common schools, hospitals, asylums, and a state penitentiary. Vallejo's plans were on a grand scale.

But if Vallejo was ambitious for the new city, he was modest about himself. He chose the name "Eureka" but was overruled by his fellow legislators who insisted that the capital be named "Vallejo" in honor of the munificent donor.

On February 4, 1851, California's second governor, John McDougal, signed the bill approving the move of the legislature to Vallejo, thus beginning the first of several moves that would embroil a number of the new cities and towns of early California, especially Benicia, Vallejo, San Jose, and Sacramento.

The first years of California's history were known for the frequent mobility of its state capital. It seemed that the capital was on wheels, moving rapidly from place to place, from year to year. The Constitutional Convention was held in the old Spanish capital of Monterey in 1849, and the first legislature (known as "The Legislature of a Thousand Drinks") met in San Jose in 1850. The second legislative session in

1851 also convened in San Jose, but by this time California had been admitted to the Union, and Vallejo's offer had been tendered.

With the acceptance of the offer by Governor McDougal in 1851, the third legislative session met in Vallejo on January 5, 1852. Yet Vallejo's glory was short-lived, for one week later, on January 12, a bill was passed moving the state capital to Sacramento.

What had happened? General Vallejo's promises had not been kept. There were inadequate accommodations in housing and office space. No rooms were available for committee meetings, or for state officials, nor were there sufficient hotels for guests. The grandiose plans of General Vallejo had not materialized, and in place of the \$125,000 state capitol building a small two-story wooden structure had been hastily erected. The legislators sent a delegation to visit the general, and he responded in a letter, dated January 24, 1852, noting that his business alliances had failed and asking that his contract "be cancelled and annulled."

But though the legislature convened in Sacramento for the session in 1852, the unexpected occurred. Nature took a hand to rewrite the history of California's state capitals. On March 7 a mighty flood over-



General Ulysses S. Grant was stationed at the Benicia Arsenal as a junior lieutenant before the Civil War. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

whelmed the levees of the American River, and most of Sacramento was inundated. The legislators, along with both the citizens and the livestock, sought refuge on the high ground. It was time again to discuss the relocation of the state capital. And though it was decided to remain in Sacramento for the duration of the session, it was agreed that the next legislature would meet, once again, in Vallejo.

Throughout this period there was intense rivalry between California's new cities and towns to claim the state capital, for it meant added business, hotels, bars, food and transportation for the many legislators and lobbyists who, even then, had emerged. San Francisco offered to erect any buildings the state needed; San Jose offered food at the low rate of \$14 per week; Sacramento offered its large, two-story courthouse, with ample dimensions of 50 feet by 70 feet, plus free tickets to the American Theatre.

When, therefore, the fourth session of the legislature met in Vallejo on January 3, 1853, Vallejo itself was barely holding on to its status as the state capital. Things had not improved. Housing was still scarce and office space limited. And, once again, General Vallejo pleaded to be released from

his earlier promises.

The most serious effort to wrest the capital from Vallejo was made by neighboring Benicia. Months before, Thomas Larkin had donated land for a "city hall," a thinly disguised plan to acquire the state capital. The low bid of \$24,800 by Franklin Houghton and L.A. Rider resulted in the erection of a Greek temple. Two fluted columns adorned the entrance, and the cornices and moldings were hand-wrought. The masts of abandoned sailing vessels were used for the interior wooden beams. It was a handsome and commodious building that would attract a state capital, especially since Benicia offered also to pay the associated moving costs.

The argument was convincing. On February 4, 1853, Governor John Bigler, California's third governor, signed the bill making Benicia the state capital, and a week later the move was made. The triumphant citizens of Benicia chartered a steam tug, the *Firefly*, and two barges to remove furniture and the archives from Vallejo to Benicia's new Greek temple capitol building, which remains standing today in all its early elegance.

Benicia maintained its position as the



William Tecumseh Sherman, known for his famous "March to the Sea" during the Civil War, served with Ulysses S. Grant at the Benicia Arsenal and Barracks. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



The Benicia State Capitol building was used as a school shortly after the official state capitol was permanently moved to Sacramento. Courtesy, Benicia Capitol State Historic Park

state capital for one full legislative session in 1853, but by the opening of the state's fifth session in 1854, grumbling could be heard. Though Benicia had many hotels, some thought the prices high and the food unpalatable. And the governor himself complained about the safety of the state archives and the poor condition of the books in the state library, contrasting the situation with that of Sacramento where there were fireproof vaults and iron safes. Actually, Governor Bigler had been an assemblyman from Sacramento and owned property there. Historian Richard Dillon notes that "Bigler was in Sacramento's pocket."

Whether it was Bigler's influence or the offer of Sacramento to provide a new courthouse, committee rooms, and state offices, plus vaults and safes for records, which proved more persuasive, there is no doubt that Sacramento was favored by many. It had rebuilt itself after the flood and was now a large city of 200 buildings, many of brick construction. On February 25, 1854, Governor Bigler signed the bill into law moving the state capital "forever" to Sacra-

mento. On March 1, 1854, the legislature convened in Sacramento, and there it has remained ever since.

The desire of cities to become the state capital was more than naked political ambition and extravagant local pride. The prospect of a state capital would set the wheels of commerce in motion. Land would be purchased or leased, housing would be built and rented, deals would be struck, and fortunes staked. Yet, except for the ultimate winner—Sacramento—these were but brief moments in the history of the economic lives of Vallejo and Benicia.

Far more important in the long run was the fact that both cities were ports, and their economic benefits derived from their locations beside deep water and their proximity to the land routes leading to the gold country. Benicia had first emerged as a port with the establishment of Semple's ferry across Carquinez Strait, and shortly thereafter the Pacific Mail Company, which boasted one of the largest "private navies" in the world, abandoned its San Francisco waterfront site for Benicia. By 1852 several hundred men were working in the machine shops, foundries and docks of the Pacific Mail Company.

Vallejo would also benefit from its waterside location, but the cause would not be private business but rather the national interest. After the acquisition of California from the Mexicans, and following statehood, it was apparent that the defenses of California would need reinforcement. It was for this reason that Commodore John Drake Sloat, who had taken Monterey from the Mexicans in 1846, was assigned in 1852 the task of identifying the site for the nation's first Pacific naval installation. It was natural that he would visit Vallejo and its nearby waters, including Mare Island. In a few short months Sloat and his committee concluded that the best site in San Francisco Bay for the new naval yard was Mare Island, which, he thought, would lie adjacent to the new state capital. On Sloat's rec-



ommendation, the island was purchased in July 1852 for \$83,401.

Two years later, in 1854, David Glasgow Farragut was named the first commander of Mare Island. He would later be named commander of the blockading sea squadrons of the Union forces in the Civil War and, in Mobile Bay, would utter the famous command: "Damn the torpedoes. Full speed ahead!" Farragut remained as commander of Mare Island for four years, until 1858, and he built solid foundations for the naval yard, which, in 1860, launched the first naval vessel constructed in the West, the paddle-wheeled steamer USS *Saginaw*.

Vallejo was also favored by the man who may well claim to be the founder of the city, even though it was General Vallejo who first admired its site and saw its immense possibilities. The man was Captain John R. Frisbie, who came to California in 1847 as a member of the New York Volunteers. In 1848 he was given command of the Sonoma Barracks, where he met General Vallejo and his eldest daughter, Epifania. Three years later, he married Epifania; by this time he had become a close business associate of General Vallejo.

In 1850 Vallejo gave Frisbie the power of attorney over his Suscol Rancho, the 84,000 land grant that extended beyond Solano into Napa County. Frisbie was an astute businessman and a generous philanthropist. He donated land in Vallejo for churches, hospitals, and schools and was the most powerful entrepreneur in the city until well into the 1870s.

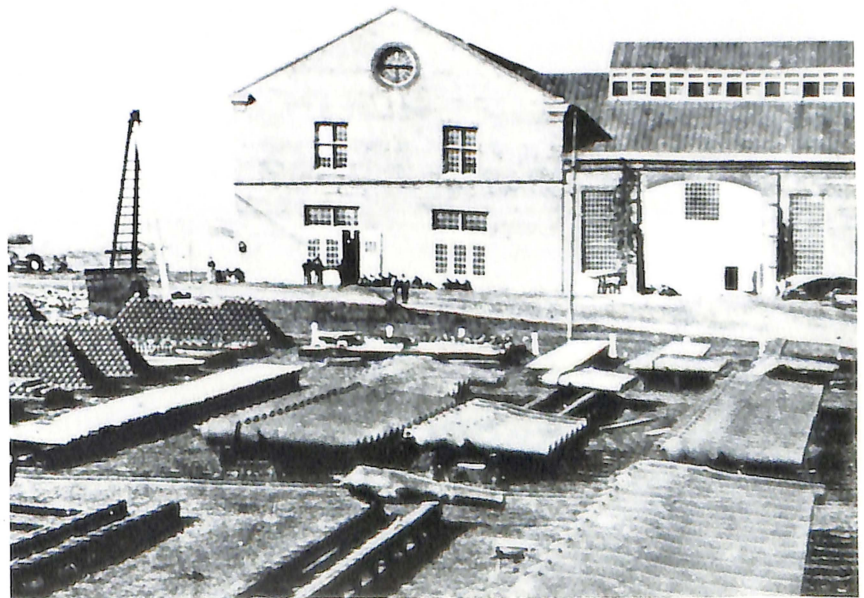
With the new authority conferred on him by his father-in-law, Captain Frisbie promoted the sale of property among the new capitalists of the Gold Rush and the general public. And the city that he promoted was most desirable. It was described in the 1870's as "beautiful in the extreme:"

The undulating hills are occupied by hundreds of beautiful homes, nearly all of which are snugly ensconced in their own gardens, surrounded by flowers of the richest hue and rarest perfume. Standing on Capitol Hill the placid bay lies at our feet it's [sic] surface without a ripple.

John Frisbie was extremely successful in selling land in and around Vallejo and Benicia, even traveling to New York and Bos-

Left: Lieutenant Commander David Glasgow Farragut was the first commander of Mare Island. Courtesy, Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum

Below: United States naval ordnance is seen here at Mare Island in 1873. The cannons were called "pop bottle" cannons as they were shaped like soda-water bottles of the period. Courtesy, Mare Island Naval Shipyard



Considered by some to be the founder of Vallejo, Captain John R. Frisbie came to California in 1847. By 1848 he was given command of the Sonoma Barracks. It was Frisbie who would go on to marry Epifania, General Vallejo's daughter. Courtesy, Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum



ton to interest prospective buyers. Those who bought land on the old Suscol Rancho from Captain Frisbie included many prominent business and political figures in California, including Robert Semple and Thomas Larkin.

Perhaps not all the purchasers recognized that the land they bought was beset with problems. Because it was part of an

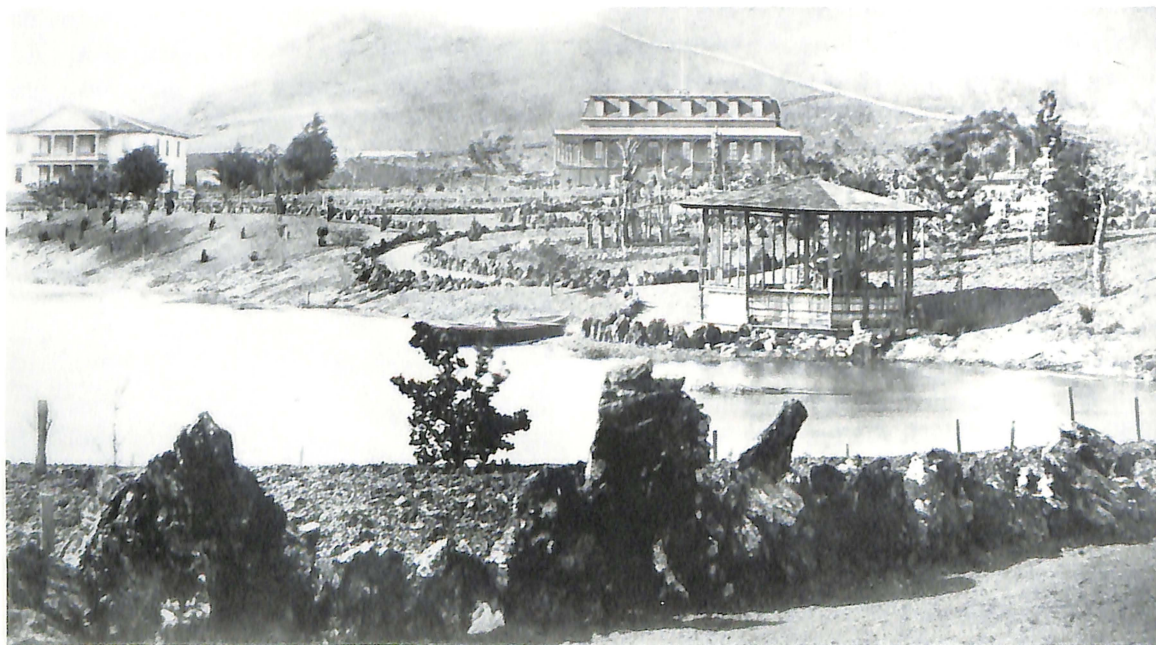
old Mexican land grant, Frisbie could not establish an absolutely clear title. Even before buyers became interested, the land was already home to scores of indigent squatters who also realized that it was disputed land.

The debate about the Suscol Grant was one of the most significant debates in the early years of Solano County, for on its outcome depended the success of the new landholders in the cities of southern Solano County—Vallejo and Benicia.

In the beginning the validity of the Suscol Grant was upheld by the Land Commission and by the Federal District Court. But the matter was appealed, and in 1862 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that General Vallejo's claim was invalid because the land had not been occupied and cultivated by him, but was rather payment for money Vallejo had loaned to the Mexican government. The squatters were overjoyed, and they were joined by others who thought that the mere occupation of the land would give title to it.

John Frisbie and his associates were, however, not without resources and they introduced legislation in the U.S. Congress that would permit the purchase of the new

The White Sulphur Springs were located at the foot of Hunter's Hill north of Vallejo. Seen here in the early 1950s, one can see the fine home (center) that General Vallejo built for his daughter Epifania, and son-in-law John Frisbie. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



holdings for \$1.25 per acre. And though the Suscol Act was defeated in 1862, it passed in 1863. The landowners now sought to rout the squatters, and evictions, shootings, and murders were not uncommon in the years after 1862.

The Suscol Act of 1863 developed into the "Suscol Principle," and in 1866 the U.S. Congress extended the Act to cover all other Mexican land grants. In effect, those who had earlier purchased land on invalidated Mexican land grants could now establish clear title at a cost of \$1.25 per acre. In 1869 the Supreme Court upheld the title of the landholders and their rights were reconfirmed.

The history of Solano County began in the south, in the partisan efforts of

Vallejo and Benicia to be established as state capitols, in the nation's defense needs to build a naval base at Mare Island and an army arsenal and barracks at Benicia, and in the lengthy litigation about the validity of the land titles on the Suscol Rancho.

In retrospect, it was the decisions of naval and military commanders, of congressmen and federal judges, that had a far greater influence on the growth and development of Benicia and Vallejo than the civic ambitions that, briefly, placed them in the spotlight of California's early political history. But pride in one's city does not easily decline, as we shall see in the establishment of new towns and cities in central and northern Solano County.

These long-range naval cannons are pictured at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard in about 1865. Courtesy, Ernest Wichels Collection





Today's Dixon May Fair began more than a century ago as Dixon May Day. May 1 was a social time when the men bet on the sulky races and women and children participated in picnics and parades. Here, Bill Wyand drives the May Queen's coach through town. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library

IV INLAND SOLANO COUNTY— NEW TOWNS AND CITIES

If the path of the gold seekers made it inevitable that the coastal towns and cities of southern Solano County developed first, that same path forced the development of the inland towns and cities. Whether the gold seekers traveled overland through the Suisun and Vaca valleys from Benicia to Sacramento or boarded a steamer or sloop for the trip up the Sacramento River, they viewed the land of Solano. Many of the travelers never forgot it, and returned either because they failed to find

the elusive gold or, having found it, wanted to start their own homesteads in the fair lands they had seen.

The travelers soon discovered that not all of Solano's ports were in deep water like Vallejo and Benicia, but could be found at the end of narrow channels or sloughs which run like fingers all along the eastern section of the county. At any number of points, the water reached far inland to make transportation both cheap and accessible. Names like Suisun City, Maine Prairie, Nurse's Landing (Denver-ton), and Bird's Landing were immediately recognized as inland ports.

It was for this reason that the whole of Solano County developed 12 townships in a relatively short period of time, from 1850 to 1871. Beginning with Benicia and Suisun (1850), they included Vallejo (1851), Vacaville (1852), Green Valley (1853), Montezuma (1854), Tremont (1855), Maine Prairie (1863), Rio Vista, Silveyville, Denver-ton (all in 1866), and Elmira (1871). The townships were named for the most populous town within their often ample boundaries, and the voters in each township elected justices of the peace and constables (until 1952 when these offices were abolished) as well as county, state, and national officials.

It was in the township of Suisun that the most important of the inland ports would be located, Suisun City, which lay on the slough which empties into Suisun Bay. The slough was next to the old Suisun Rancho, which General Vallejo had once granted to Chief Solano and then purchased back in 1842 for \$1,000.

On August 29, 1850, Vallejo sold the entire Suisun Rancho of four square leagues to Archibald A. Ritchie for \$50,000: \$10,000 in cash and

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These quarrymen were photographed at Nelson's Hill above Cordelia in the 1880s. Quarrying is one of Solano County's oldest industries, dating from the 1850s. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council (Rulofson Collection)



\$40,000 in a mortgage. On the same day, Ritchie sold a one-third interest to Captain Robert Waterman for \$16,666, making his down payment as well as a neat profit.

It is probable that Captain Waterman paid cash for his share, for he was a wealthy man, having served for many years as the master of clipper ships out of Boston and New York in trade with the Orient. In 1829 Waterman was the youngest ship's captain in America's merchant fleet. Later he was captain of the *Natchez*, a full-rigged New Orleans packet, and in 1846 was given command of the first great clipper ship *Sea Witch*, on which he established the all-time sailing record of 74 days from Hong Kong to New York; in one 24-hour period, the *Sea Witch* logged the incredible distance of 358 miles.

Waterman's last command was the clipper ship *Challenge* on an 1851 run from New York to San Francisco. It was after this journey that he was charged with the mistreatment, even murder, of crew members. Though he was finally acquitted of all charges, "Bully" Waterman, as he was known by his men, was a strict disciplinarian, not adverse to frequent flogging and willing, if necessary, to fight his own battles with his fists.

When Captain Waterman left the sea after the several trials he endured, he had al-

ready prepared for retirement by his partial purchase of the Suisun Rancho from Archibald Ritchie. However, Ritchie was not Waterman's partner for long because, quite unexpectedly, in January 1853 he was killed when his team of horses bolted and overturned his rig. Ritchie's widow then gave Waterman power of attorney over the remaining portions of the Rancho, and he was most successful in selling off parcels and developing the land.

Yet it was not an easy task, because before and after Ritchie's death the Suisun Rancho was constantly invaded by squatters. One of their number, James Dorland, a vigorous opponent who was the declared enemy of Ritchie and Waterman, established the Suisun Settler's League and went to court. To defend their rights, Ritchie and Waterman hired lawyer John Currey, who finally obtained a court order removing Dorland from his site near today's Rockville. Dorland then went north, purchased land and, ironically, was himself harassed by squatters, one of whom killed him in a bitter dispute. John Currey later ran for the state supreme court, was elected, and in 1866 became California's eighth supreme court chief justice.

Not all land developments were as tumultuous as those involving the squatters. Some hamlets developed because they pro-

vided an important local service, like blacksmithing. For example, Rockville became an important place in 1852 when J.M. Perry established his blacksmith shop near the junction of the Benicia-Sacramento Road, not far from today's Solano Community College. Farmers came to Perry for repair of their wagons and harnesses and to purchase ploughs; before long J.W. Seaver had built a general store, and, nearby, Christley Manka established a tavern that is known today as Manka's Corner. Rockville, which had once been the home of Chief Solano, soon had a church, and the stage depot was located there.

Road travel may have been suitable for passengers and for small, valuable cargo, but it was not useful for the tons of grain and farm produce that were heavy, bulky and were in great demand in the goldfields. As Robert Waterman surveyed his vast lands, he saw that there were various sloughs bordering his Suisun Rancho that would accommodate the region's future water traffic, for they lay close to some of the area's best farmland. He selected the head of one of the channels, the one closest to the Benicia-Sacramento Road, and named it "Cordelia" in honor of his wife. It seems that Cordelia had criticized him for having named a street in his birthplace, Fairfield, Connecticut, for a former sweetheart, and the captain was attempting to placate his jealous wife. By all accounts, he succeeded, yet Captain Waterman was so persistent in his admiration of Miss Jones that he also named a street, "Great Jones," in the center of his new town of Fairfield, California. It is another bond between the two Fairfields.

But Waterman had not fully explored all the sloughs in the Suisun Marsh, and in 1851 a far less famous skipper, Josiah Wing, discovered an island rising five feet above the marsh, just outside the jurisdiction of Waterman's Suisun Rancho. Wing's landing lay about five miles closer to the farms of the Lagoon and Vaca valleys and proved to be a far superior commercial cen-

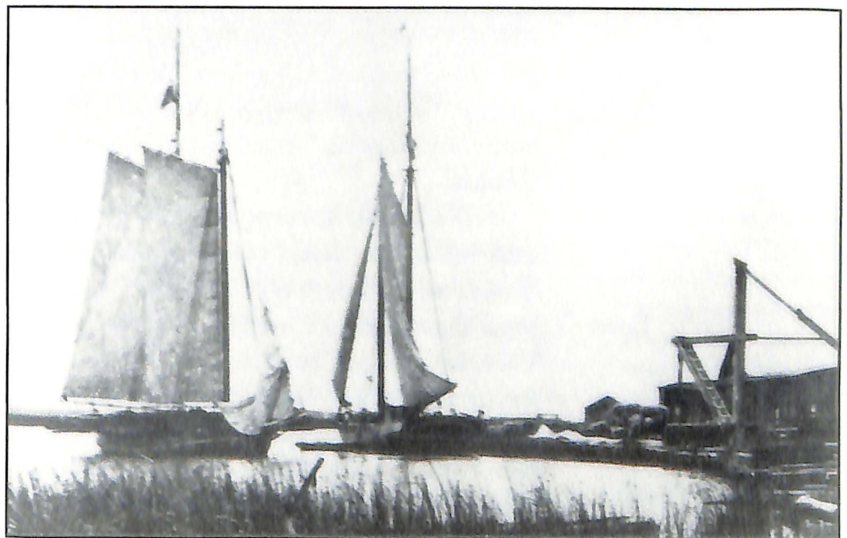
ter. In 1852 a wharf and warehouse were built, and in 1854 the streets of Suisun City were laid out. In the winter of 1855 six vessels were required to handle the trade of the bustling town.

Waterman may have been defeated in his efforts to build the first major inland port in Solano County, but he was not daunted. In 1856 he established the town of Fairfield just adjacent to Suisun City and sought to make it the county seat. Waterman was a shrewd, ambitious, and successful man whose human dimensions have been well described by historian Richard Dillon:

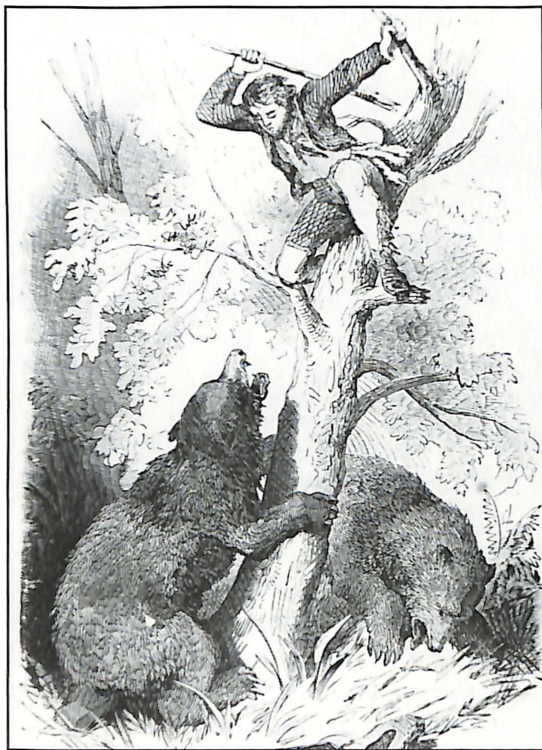
Solano County folk like to remember him as one of their landed gentry, the founder of Cordelia and Fairfield, but he was also "the first of sailors." He was a tough man in a tough age. He would brook no nonsense on board his vessels, but he was no "vile monster." His friends knew that he was a complex man, tough rather than brutish, with a grain of good humor running through his hard-boiled nature.

In contrast to Suisun City and Fairfield, which were founded due to the competition for commerce, Vacaville was founded as a matter of honor and pride. The site lay in the Vaca Valley in the Los Puntos

Suisun Harbor is pictured here in a rare photo from the 1860s. Suisun was favored early as a harbor because of its deeper water which allowed good tidal anchorage for schooners. The wharf is probably Pierce's Wharf. Courtesy, College of Solano Library



What happened to Kit Carson also happened to James Pleasants during his first night in Pleasants Valley in 1850. Bears treed both all night. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



Rancho, the land grant given in 1842 by Vallejo to "Manuel Vaca and the families he brings." This beautiful land of fertile soil, oak trees, and streams attracted William McDaniel, a Kentucky lawyer who had become a rancher, a U.S. land agent, and a developer. When McDaniel offered Manuel Vaca \$3,000 for a nine-square-mile plot, Vaca agreed—on condition that a town be laid out there named in his honor and that 1,055 lots be given to him. McDaniel concurred, and on December 31, 1851, a "Mapa de la villa a Vacaville, Estado de California" was filed in Solano County.

McDaniel, in turn, deeded half the land to Lansing Bond Mizner, a resident of Benicia who shared with McDaniel and Vaca the distinction of founding the city of Vacaville. Mizner later became a state senator, but he is also known in Solano County for having conducted its first census. From September 30 to November 20, 1850, he counted the residents and discovered 580 persons, only 100 of whom, in

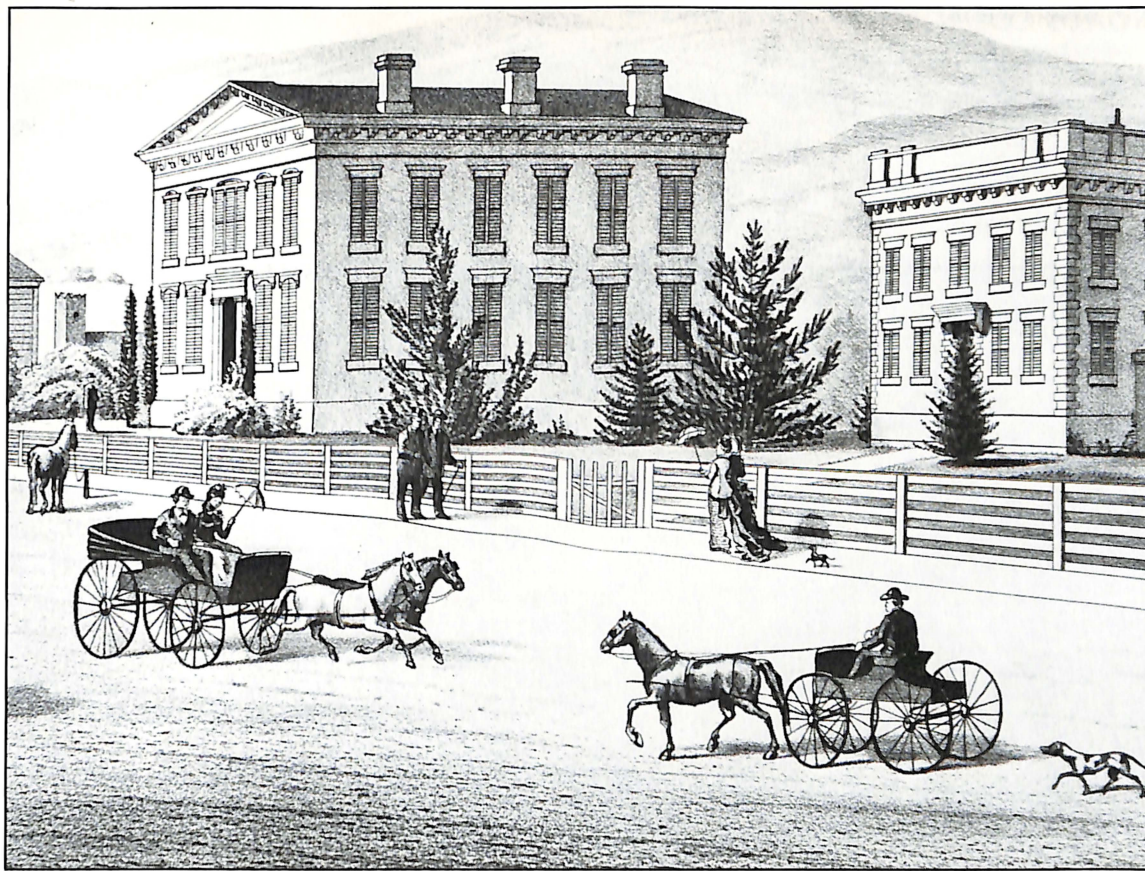
29 families, lived outside Benicia.

Among those first residents were some interesting pioneers. One was James W. Pleasants, who with his two sons walked through the Vaca Valley and came upon another valley beyond it which lay in the public domain, not part of any of the land grants. Pleasants named it for his family, Pleasants Valley, and he became a professional hunter of deer, elk, and grizzly bear, until the Wolfskill brothers in nearby Rio de las Puntos Rancho gave him some sheep and grape cuttings to begin his own farm. Pleasants later recalled that in one afternoon on a 10-mile ride he saw 11 grizzly bears, one of which he killed; it weighed 800 pounds dressed.

Another well-known family was that of Mason and Luzena Wilson, who had built a house with lumber carried from Benicia in 1852. Before that, they lived in what they described as their prairie "hotel," sleeping in the open air. In those days, when roads were nonexistent, recreation consisted mainly of shooting matches and horse races; visits between families were rare. Mrs. Wilson in her memoirs described her first dinner party in these early times:

The second Christmas [1852] of our stay I gave a dinner party and invited all the Americans in Vaca Valley; even then I entertained only five guests. My dinner party was considered very fine for the time. My cook was a negro of the blackest hue, who had formerly cooked for some army officer . . . The menu included onion soup, roast elk, a fricassee of lamb, boiled onions, the home-grown luxury of radishes, lettuce, parsley, dried-apple pie and rice pudding. Fowls were too valuable to be sacrificed . . .

As the inland towns grew, there was more and more reason for travel to the county seat of Benicia. Many of the land grant disputes were being settled, and legal papers needed to be filed at the Recorder's of-



Left: Fairfield was very proud of its new courthouse and jail. The parade of people and animals affords a unique view of life before the turn of the century. This is a portion of a larger picture published in 1877. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

fice, while the duties of the court and of jurors also required travel south. Like many California counties, Solano was in need of a county seat that was centrally located. The March 20, 1858, edition of the *Solano County Herald* carried an editorial entitled "Removal of the County Seat," and noted: "the long-mooted question is about to be tested."

It was decided to hold a county convention to determine which of the centrally located towns would be best, after which a general county election would be held. When the delegates met, they heard offers from the various towns. Captain Robert Waterman spoke for Fairfield and proposed giving 16 acres called Union Square plus four adjacent blocks and his personal bond of \$10,000. A.P. Jackson of Suisun offered a lot 120 feet by 100 feet, known as Owen's Tavern Stand, and a sum of \$5,500. Mason Wilson of Vacaville offered four blocks of land and \$1,000 while Denver-ton proudly stood on its own merits offering nothing.

When the voting was over, Fairfield had won, receiving 16 votes to Suisun's 12 and Denver-ton's one. The matter was then placed before the citizens of the entire



county, and the results again favored Fairfield. A total of 1,730 votes were cast as follows: Fairfield, 1,029; Benicia, 625; Denver-ton, 38; Suisun, 26; Vallejo, 10; Rockville, 2.

The success of Fairfield was not due entirely to the generosity of Captain Waterman and the undeniable virtues of his new town, but also to the legacy of the old dispute between Benicia and Vallejo over the

Above: Rural mail delivery from Dixon to Maine Prairie was accomplished by George (Pap) Hulen and his team. The large wheels were well adapted to the muddy, rutted dirt roads of the time. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library



Rio Vista is pictured here at the turn of the century. Note the carbon-arc streetlights. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum

site of the state capital. It had only been a few years since these two coastal cities had competed for that honor. The rivalry still simmered. The citizens of Vallejo decided to avenge themselves on Benicia and threw their votes to Fairfield. The editorial in the *Solano County Herald* a few days later was entitled "Et Tu Brute":

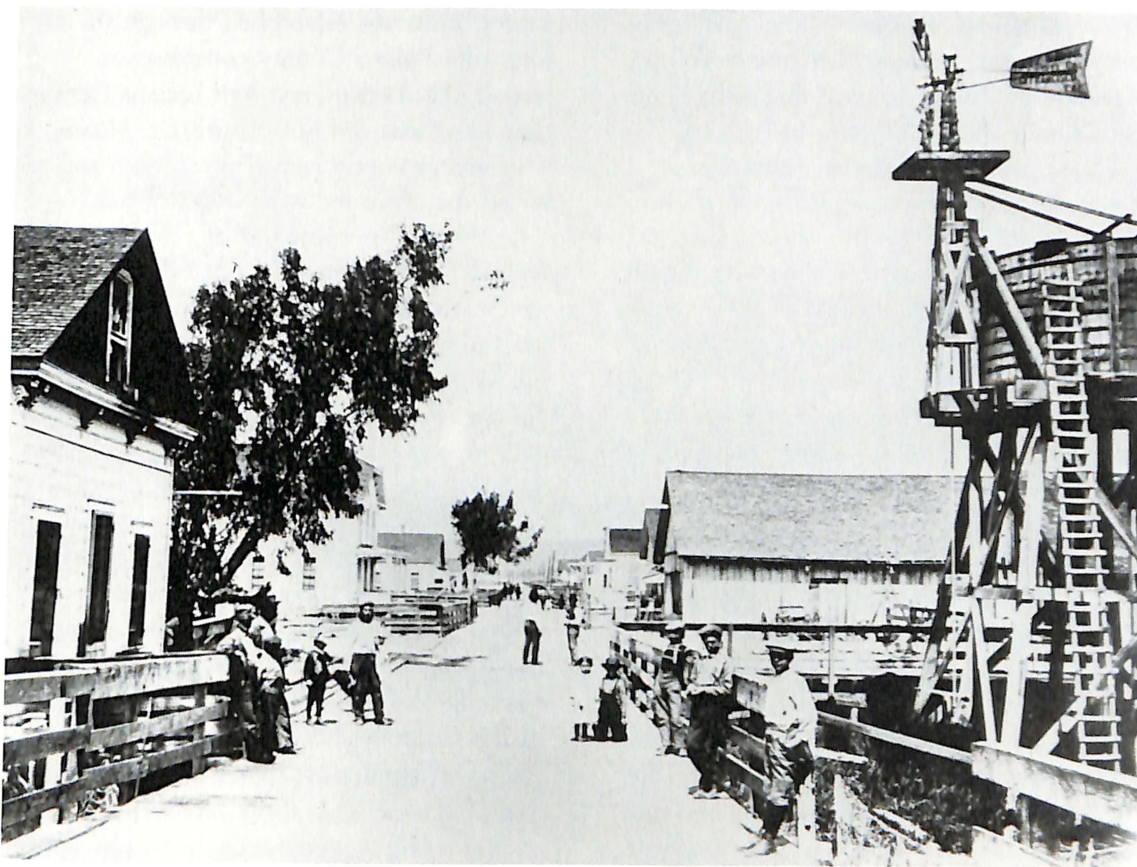
In every general engagement, however glorious the bulletin of victory, there necessarily follows the melancholy supplement of casualties. In the list of killed and wounded of Wednesday's battle, our eye falls mournfully on the name of Benicia—Benicia! The long-suffering mortally wounded, if not dead—killed by Vallejo's unsparing hand! That the people of Suisun and the adjoining region should have desired a removal of the county seat was by no means surprising: but Vallejo! et tu Brute! In the house of our friends we were wounded.

The central location of Fairfield was a major reason for its selection in 1858 as Solano's county seat, but other towns were also being established because of their advantageous locations, especially if they were near

water. Travel by road was a long and hazardous effort, and rains often would make roads impassable. Beyond Vacaville, for example, there was a junction where the summer road to Sacramento went one way and the winter road another; during the winter rains, the traveler would move upland away from the tidal lands and the numerous sloughs of the county.

The one predictable form of transportation was water. Because both Sacramento to the north and Vallejo and San Francisco to the south were accessible by way of the lengthy Sacramento River, a number of small ports developed along the eastern shore of Solano County. While some are scarcely remembered today, they served as a vital link between the farms and small towns of the interior and the larger world beyond.

Maine Prairie is a good example of a Solano County ghost town. Located on Cache Slough northeast of Fairfield, it was settled in 1859 and had a hotel and general store by 1860. In 1863 it had become one of the most important grain-shipping points in California; in that year 50,000 tons of



The town of Collinsville was an important landing point for grain in the early days. It was built on pilings above the tide and floodwaters near the mouth of Montezuma Slough. There is little left of the town today. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum. Mel Paoline Collection

grain were shipped from Maine Prairie, second only to the port of Stockton. Yet, with the coming of the railroad, Maine Prairie passed from the scene.

A quite different story is that of Rio Vista, the most easterly port in Solano County, in the Los Ulpinos grant given to General John Bidwell by Governor Manuel Micheltorena in 1844. Rio Vista has survived and flourished to the present day, but it has been subjected to several changes of name and location. The first name was of Indian origin and came as a result of Bidwell's invitation to a group of immigrant gold seekers to spend the winter on his land. It was an inhospitable winter with little food, which gave rise to the name *haleche-muck*, which the Patwin Indians translated as "nothing to eat."

The second name was *Brazos del Rio*, or "Arms of the River," which was appropriate, for the town lies just south of the

three branches of the Sacramento River. That name was bestowed by Colonel N.H. Davis, who established a town site in 1855. For the next few years the town prospered because it was the only steamboat landing between Benicia and Sacramento. It was famous for its excellent salmon, which were rushed to ready markets in Sacramento and San Francisco, and for the elegant steamers that stopped regularly. A post office was established in 1858, and the postmaster requested a change in the town's name. Davis complied by calling it "Vista del Rio," which was shortened by common usage to "Rio Vista."

Rio Vista, however, was soon to suffer a calamity. Torrential rains began in the last days of 1861, and by January 9, 1862, the flooding waters reached 12 feet, sweeping the town and its wharves away. This disaster led to the speculation that such floods had occurred before. Because

he was the oldest resident of the time, an inquiry was sent to General Mariano Vallejo. In response, Vallejo declared that he had, during a similar flood 20 years before, sailed in a southwesterly direction from Sacramento across the Los Ulpinos grant right into Benicia!

After the flood, Rio Vista was rebuilt on a site farther removed from the river, and it prospered as a center for salmon fishing, for dredging and the building of levees, and as a port for agricultural products, especially wheat and hay.

Denver-ton was another port, lying inland just 10 miles east of Fairfield at the end of a slough winding south to enter the Sacramento River just opposite today's Pittsburg and Antioch in Contra Costa County. Its earlier name was "Nurse's Landing," in honor of a traveling New York dentist, Dr. S.K. Nurse, who built a house there in 1853 and a wharf and storehouse a year later. In 1858

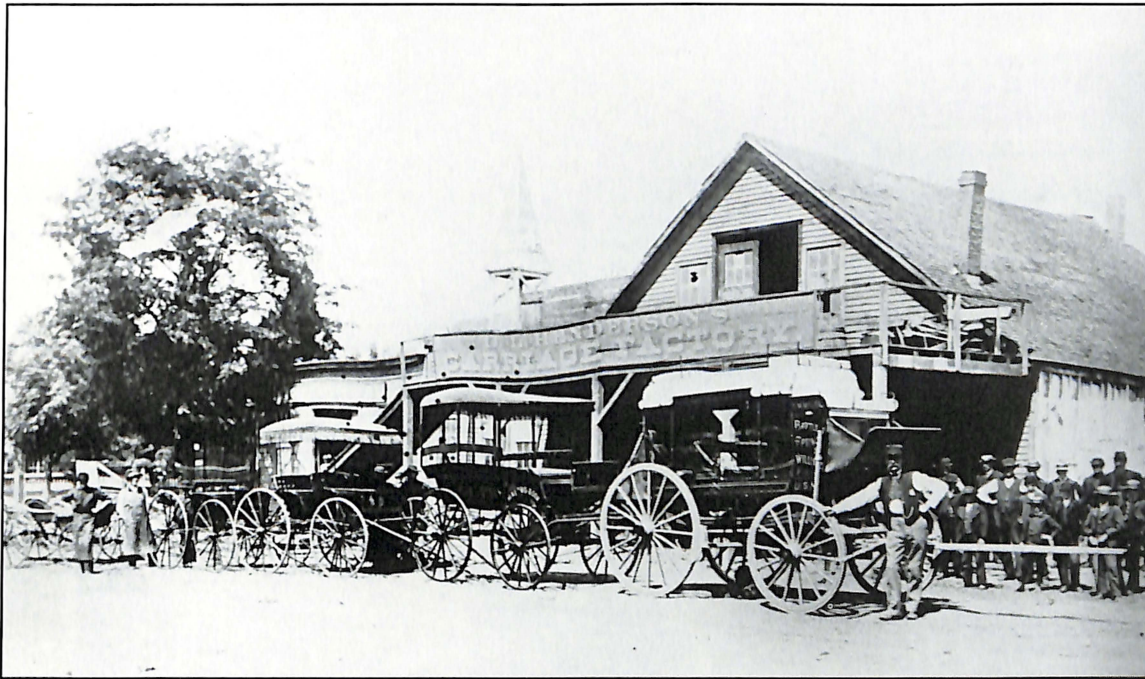
a post office was established through the efforts of a Solano County congressman named J.W. Denver, and so it became Denver-ton, a fact that did not disturb Dr. Nurse, who was promptly named postmaster and retained the office for well over 20 years.

At the opposite end of the slough (called "Nurse's Slough" on today's maps), just where it enters the Sacramento River, lies the town of Collinsville, about one mile west, and an adobe building known today as the "Montezuma Adobe" because it was located in the township of Montezuma. The house was built in 1846 by Lansford W. Hastings, who also laid out a site for immigrant Mormons, though they ultimately rejected it because there was no available timber. Hastings was well-traveled throughout the West and published *The Emigrant's Guide* in 1844 for Easterners eager to travel in the western lands.

Collinsville itself was established in

This Fourth of July celebration was held at the Tonnesen ranch, Bird's Landing. A celebration was a welcome change from the hard task of farming. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum





Nearly every Solano town had a carriage shop. C.L. Henderson's Carriage Factory at Vallejo was famous for quality throughout Northern California in the late 1800s. Courtesy, Ernest Wichels Collection

1859 when C.J. Collins surveyed the land, built a wharf and store, and christened the area with his own name. In 1867 it became a real estate development under an enterprising businessman, S.C. Bradshaw, who renamed it Newport to attract eastern buyers. The plan failed, and the name Collinsville was restored and remains today.

Midway between Collinsville and Denver, a man named John Bird purchased 1,000 acres in 1856 and set up a shipping and trade center that became known as Bird's Landing, which remains today a small, vigorous village.

Just outside Bird's Landing, about three miles north, is the tall, white, impressive structure known as Shiloh Church. It was built by the Cumberland Presbyterians in 1869 and was rebuilt following a destructive fire in 1875. Today it stands alone as a silent witness to the early pioneers of what is still called Montezuma Hills. In its large and well-kept graveyard are found the final resting places of the pioneer families, including Charles and Emily Jane Bird.

As one reviews the origins of the inland towns and cities of Solano, it is clear

that each was founded in a spirit of adventure and speculation. It required ambition of a high order for Juan Manuel Vaca and William McDaniel to set out a town named Vacaville in 1851 with plans for over 1,000 lots when the entire county had a population numbered only in the hundreds. Great expectations were also evident in the decisions of Captain Robert Waterman to name a new town "Fairfield" in honor of a well-established and famous city in Connecticut, then to secure for it almost immediately the title of the county seat.

Perhaps the highest expression of these soaring ambitions can be found in the early name "New York of the Pacific," given to today's Pittsburg, just across the water from Collinsville.

But if all the dreams, ulterior motives, and high purposes of the pioneers in laying out the towns and cities of Solano were not fully realized, their good judgment in establishing trading centers near transportation points would be fully confirmed as Solano County mined its own form of gold nuggets—the fruits and the produce of its generous and fertile land.



These "good old boys"
are seen relaxing in
front of the sample
room and bank at El-
mira. A sample room
was where salesmen
brought samples of
their wares for dis-
play. Courtesy, Vaca-
ville Heritage Council
(Vacaville Library
Collection)

V FARMING, RAILROADS, AND POLITICS

The history of many California counties is the history of the transition from ranches to farms, from livestock and cattle to crops and harvests. But the history of Solano County includes something more: its convenient location between ready markets for its produce, serving it first as the roadway between the bustling port of San Francisco and the gold-fields near Sacramento, and later

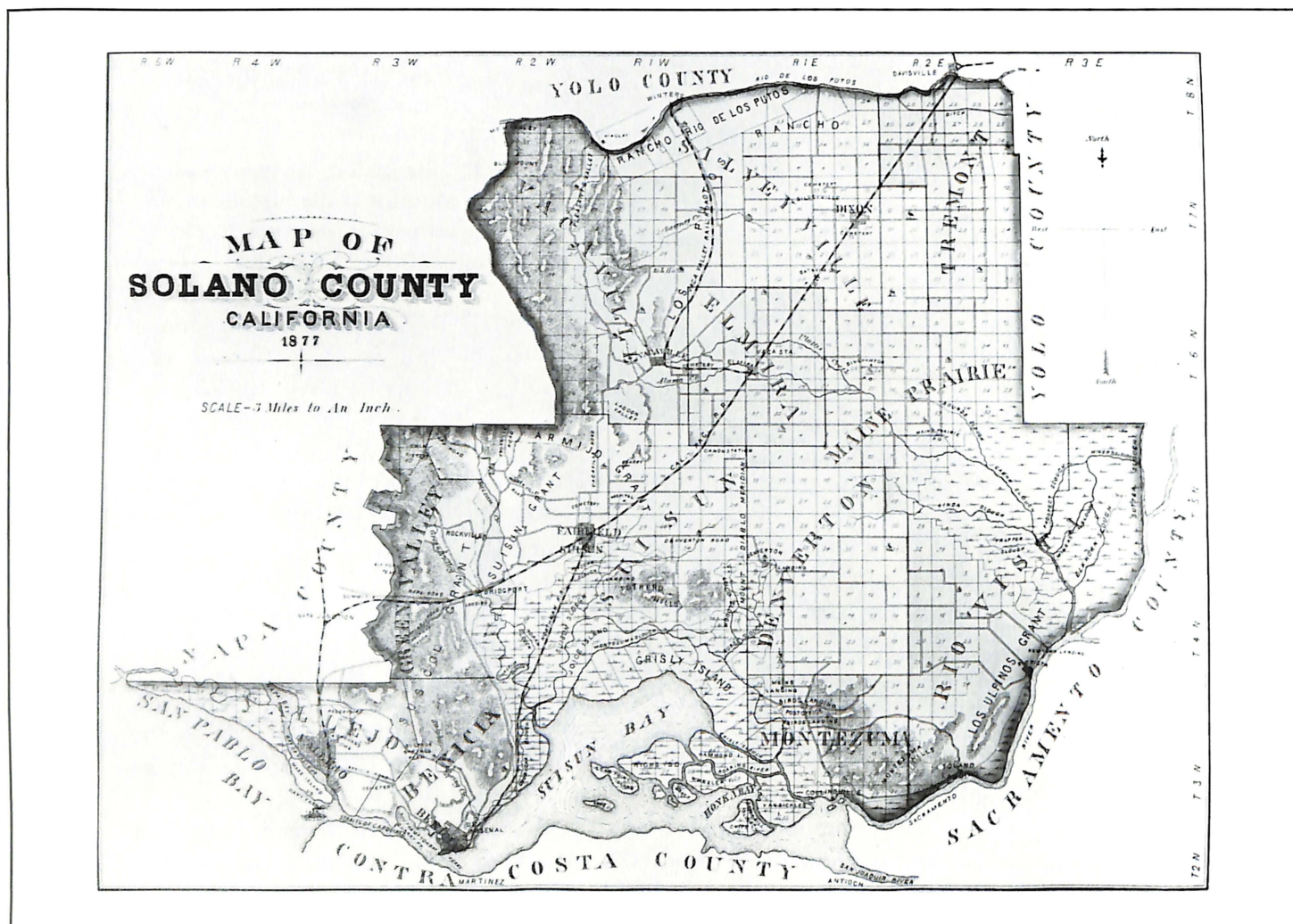
as the western terminus of the railroad connecting bountiful crops with thriving Midwestern and Eastern cities.

In the first decade and a half after the Gold Rush, the land of Solano was pastoral and provided vast grazing ranges for cattle and sheep. It was the day of the stockbreeder, when Spanish cattle were being replaced by new breeds of European cattle. Later, cattle were driven up from ranchos in southern California to be fattened up, and, after several months to a year in the Suisun and Vaca valleys, were driven to Sacramento for slaughter, then shipped to eastern markets.

Sheep were introduced at least as early as 1852 when William Long Buck of Vacaville brought a herd of 3,000 head from Missouri, after losing thousands on the way overland. By 1862 over 130,000 head were being raised, many in the Howell Mountains, which was known then as one of the leading wool-producing areas in northern California.

But the pastoral setting would soon be replaced by cultivation, and the first major crop in Solano would be wheat. California had been an importer of wheat until 1854, when it first met its own needs, and by 1855 a surplus was produced. A combination of events then conspired to make wheat production more profitable than cattle. The growth of California's population and a series of wars in Europe, coupled with poor harvests there and a famine in Ireland, led to a huge rise in the price of wheat. Wheat fields soon covered the valley floors; on December 11, 1867, the *Solano Press* announced enthusiastically, "Hurrah for Solano!!! The Surveyor General announces that Solano County, in 1866, was the second largest wheat growing county in the State and that, in 1867, she leads the van."

In a time when refrigeration was unknown, wheat had several other advantages over the production of cattle, for, unlike meat, wheat could be stored without spoiling.



This 1877 map of Solano County clearly shows the townships as well as the grants issued to landowners. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

The rise of wheat production led to the construction of flour mills, and the county's first was built by a Connecticut immigrant who arrived in Benicia in 1850, George Dingley. In 1853 he purchased a 64-acre tract on the Wild Horse Creek in upper Green Valley and erected a water-powered flour mill, to be replaced in 1859 by a three-story mill of stone construction. In 1854 J.G. Edwards and S.C. Read built a water-powered mill at Suisun City and replaced it in 1858 with a three-story mill that was powered by a steam engine.

These early mills were but the precursors for the largest mill of them all, the Starr Flour Mill. It was built on Mare Island Strait in South Vallejo in 1869 by

Abraham Dubois Starr. Starr was a prominent Solano figure, being elected a county supervisor and, in 1873, a delegate to the Republican convention in Philadelphia, which nominated Ulysses S. Grant for reelection. Starr enlarged his mill over the years until, in 1883, it was producing 2,000 barrels of milled flour a day. After the depression of 1893, the company went bankrupt; Starr himself died in 1894. Later, the mill was purchased by George McNear of Marin County, who retained possession until 1910 when the Sperry Company purchased the property and mill.

The Starr Flour Mill was so prominent in South Vallejo that the famous Scottish writer, Robert Louis Stevenson,

commented in his *Silerado Squatters* as he traveled north toward Calistoga in 1880:

there was a tall building beside the pier, labeled the Starr Flour Mills; and sea-going, full-rigged ships lay close alongshore, waiting for their cargo. Soon these would be plunging round the Horn, soon the flour from the Starr Flour Mills would be landed on the wharves of Liverpool . . . thither, to this gaunt mill, across the Atlantic and Pacific deeps and round about the icy Horn, this crowd of great, three masted deep-sea ships come, bringing nothing, and return with bread.

Though wheat was highly successful, Solano County would not derive its excellent reputation as a farming community only from it. From the earliest days, the pioneers and settlers had practiced a great variety of subsistence farming to provide fruits and vegetables for the family table. As they satisfied local needs, they looked beyond for commercial crops.

The first of these far-sighted settlers were the Wolfskill brothers. As noted, William Wolfskill gave grape cuttings from his Los Angeles rancho to his brother, John, who, in turn, passed them on to James Pleasants as early as 1851. Another recipient was M.R. Miller in Pleasants Valley, who had grafted Muscats to his Mission stock and produced a superior table grape. An enterprising man, Miller attempted to ship his grapes to the eastern markets by packing them in cork dust. The journey included wagon transport from Pleasants Valley to Suisun City, then by schooner to San Francisco, and finally by ship around the Horn to the East Coast. It was a brave attempt which failed, for the grapes were bruised and spoiled upon arrival. Only the coming of the railroad would permit the shipment of grapes to the East.

If the production of table grapes was the aim of John Wolfskill and his Pleasants Valley neighbors, the production of wine was of more interest to the settlers in



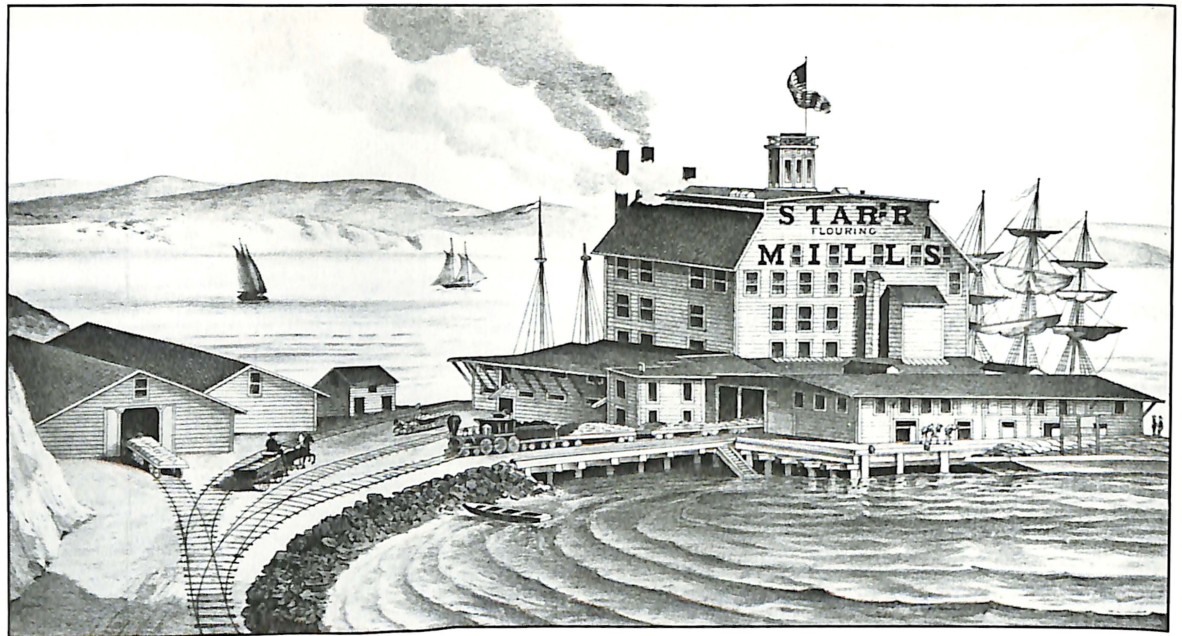
Green Valley. One of the first and most prominent was John Votypka, an Austrian emigrant who laid out a vineyard and built a wine cellar in 1858 and was shipping wine from the inland port of Cordelia to San Francisco by 1863. The *Solano County Herald* of October 3, 1866, noted the names of Germans, and also Frenchmen and Italians, who had "performed their apprenticeship in the Old World."

In these early years it appeared that grapes might become the dominant crop, at least in the hills and valleys of Solano County. However, the dreaded plant lice, *phylloxera*, appeared among the vines in the early 1870s, and by 1875 many of the finest vineyards had been destroyed. The disease attacked first in the northern valleys, where the destruction was greatest. In Green Valley the wine industry survived, partly because of the development of new resistant vines and rootstocks. Yet the *phylloxera* did slow, and in some places eliminate, the production of grapes either for table use or for the making of wine.

The search for a commercial crop was not limited to grapes and wheat, for, from

The Green Valley home of Granville Perry Swift is pictured here sometime around 1880. Swift acquired the home from James Harbin in 1864 and later deeded the property to his sister, Mary Jones, in 1868. Courtesy, Solano Community College Library Archives

Right: The Starr Flour Mills were major grain processors for Solano County until the turn of the century when it became Sperry Mills. Flour was shipped all over the world from this point. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



Below: The railroad was a favorite means by which politicians campaigned for office across the continent.

Seen here, on the train platform with a moustache and beard, Charles Evans Hughes addresses an enthusiastic Dixon crowd. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library Collection



the very beginning, there had been a great variety in Solano's products. John Wolfskill had experimented successfully with figs, apricots, peaches, pears, almonds, oranges, and pomegranates. Given his proximity on the Rio de las Putas grant to the markets in and around Sacramento and the goldfields, John Wolfskill became well-known both for the variety and quality of his fruits and vegetables.

It was this reputation that brought two gardeners from Massachusetts, John Dolan and Ansel Putnam, to the upper reaches of Pleasants Valley near Putah Creek around 1857. They had been growing tomatoes and vegetables for the San Francisco market on a piece of the old Suscol

Rancho near Napa on land belonging to William and Simpson Thompson. Dolan and Putnam were successful in raising tomatoes but their harvests arrived too late in the season. For this reason they moved their operations to Pleasants Valley, where the mountains blocked out the damp fog and where a light wind prevented an early frost.

But the combination of Putnam, Dolan, and the Thompson brothers was something more than a search for an early crop of vegetables. They were seeking all the elements of success in agriculture, including transportation. Observing that the uneven roads caused the bruising of fruit, Ansel Putnam took the lead in organizing neighboring farmers in building bridges and grading the road from Pleasants Valley to the Suisun City embarcadero, where schooners awaited the fruit for transport to San Francisco. When the road was completed around 1858, farmers who had previously grown fruits and vegetables only for home consumption now saw an opportunity for expansion of their lands and for profitable orchards and truck gardens. What these Solano farming pioneers had discovered was a complete plan involving the production, transportation and the marketing of fruits and vegetables.

Some famous names of this period include the same M.R. Miller, who, in addition to grapes, also raised peaches, apricots, and white Smyrna figs. In the *San Francisco Call* of July 12, 1863, a writer noted that

Miller's were the "first [California] figs ever brought to the San Francisco market."

E.R. Thurber was another Pleasants Valley farmer who planted peaches when the *phylloxera* epidemic destroyed his vineyard, then moved his orchard to an elevation that allowed an earlier harvest than those planted on bottomlands. And in the English Hills above Vaca Valley, William Cantelow began the early cultivation of fruit, along with W.W. Smith, who in 1863 purchased wheat land protected by the bluffs and planted cherries, which, in favorable years, were shipped as early as March 31.

But the development of what became known as "The Vacaville Early Fruit District" would not have been possible without a new means of transportation—the railroad—that would provide the fast and efficient movement of early fruit.

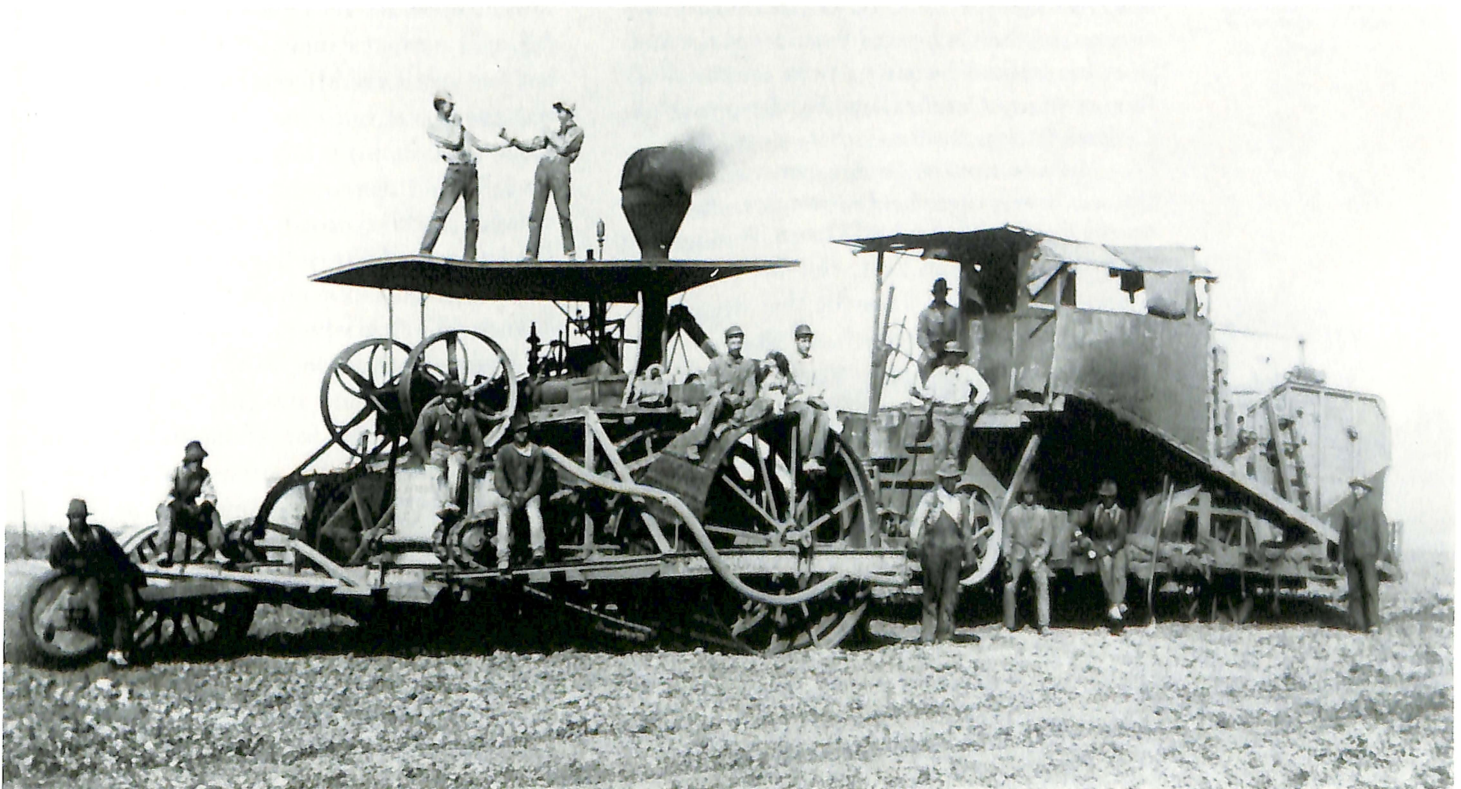
Planning for a railroad through Solano County had begun as early as 1865 when the California Pacific Railroad was incorporated. An enterprising capitalist, D.C.

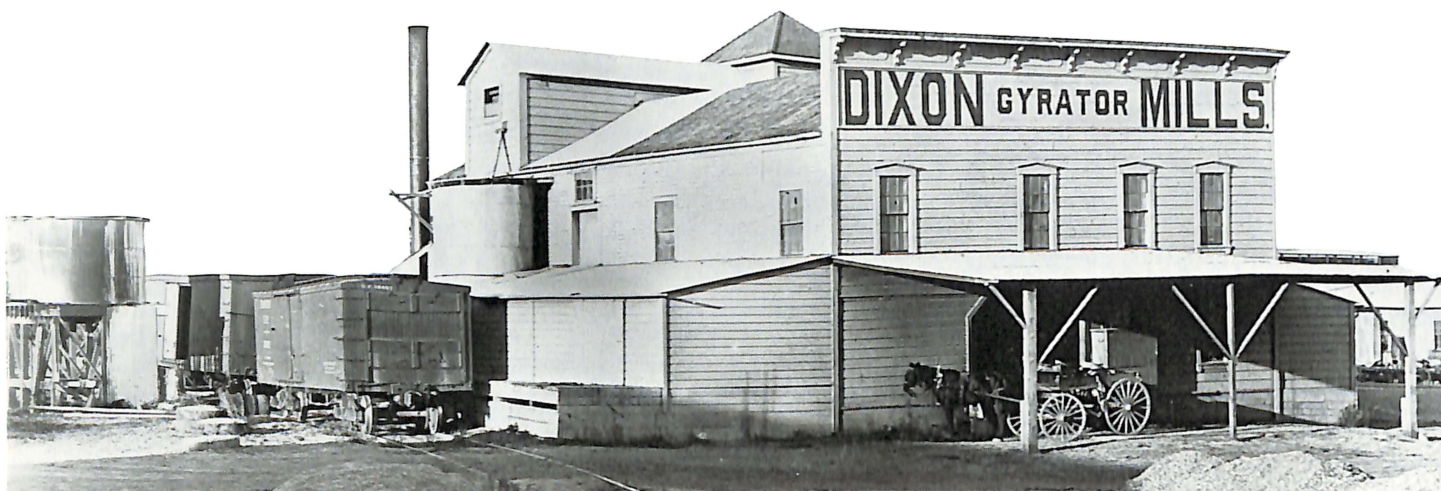
Haskin, who owned much property in Vallejo, was the general manager of the California Pacific during its period of construction. Among his associates were Captain John Frisbie of Vallejo and Abraham D. Starr of the Starr Flour Mill. The "Cal P," as it was affectionately known, was clearly a Vallejo enterprise.

By May 1867 there were 350 men and 100 teams of horses working on the railroad bed from Vallejo through Jameson Canyon to Suisun City. By June 24, 1868, a five-car train full of sightseers entered Suisun City on the Cal P line and a few days later freight and passenger service from Vallejo to Suisun City and neighboring Fairfield was inaugurated.

The California Pacific Railroad had an immediate effect on the towns, cities, and services of Solano County. The town of Cordelia moved several hundred yards north of its old site to relocate next to the railroad, and it was renamed "Bridgeport" after the Connecticut home of Robert Waterman's

This tractor had probably been working wheat in the Maine Prairie area. The broad wheel surfaces of the new tractors provided good traction and did not tend to sink into the ground. Note the offset front wheel and barrel roller. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum





With the coming of the railroad, Dixon became the largest shipper of grain in central California. Mills, such as Bill Wyand's

Gyrator Mill, processed a great deal of the grain and feed locally. The grain industry is still of major importance to Dixon's commerce. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library

wife, Cordelia (later, its original name was restored). Rockville was diminished because former stage passengers instead took the speedier rails, which advertised a train and ship combination of only three and one-half hours travel from San Francisco to the outskirts of Sacramento. The Cal P was not allowed entrance to Sacramento proper because the dominant railroad of the time, the Central Pacific, denied access.

The competition between the two railroads was fierce. Indeed, one reason for the success of the California Pacific was the support it received because of the intense dislike of many Californians for the powerful Central Pacific Railroad.

In addition to Bridgeport, two other Solano towns owe their existence to the California Pacific: Elmira and Dixon. A month after reaching Suisun City, the Cal P reached a spot just east of Vacaville that became known as "Vaca Station" or "Elmira." Named for Elmira, New York, this railroad junction became the very center of transport for the fruits and vegetables of Vaca and Pleasants valleys in their most productive years.

The town of Dixon literally came into existence when the Cal P reached it on August 18, 1868. The train station was built on a 10-acre plot donated by Thomas Dickson, a prosperous rancher. In his honor, it was first called "Dickson's Station," but when the first consignment of goods ar-

rived, the address erroneously read "Dixon," and so it has remained.

However, the town of Dixon is indebted to the earlier town of Silveyville, which lay two and one-half miles away and was founded in 1852 by Elijah Silvey. Silvey placed a hotel, saloon, and corral midway between Suisun City and Sacramento to receive the steady stream of weary prospectors heading toward the goldfields. He became well-known because he would, at sunset, hoist a red lantern high above the tall wild oats, reaching as high as eight or ten feet, so it could be seen at night and direct the travelers to his places of business. Later a store and a blacksmith shop were opened, and the town prospered. With the coming of the railroad in 1868, however, the citizens of Silveyville simply picked up their belongings, including churches and homes, marched several miles and moved to Dixon, abandoning Silveyville.

A similar fate awaited Maine Prairie, the shipping point for alfalfa and the many grains—wheat, barley, oats—that grew so well on the fertile flat lands around Silveyville. On a single day in 1861, 180 wagons loaded with grain were lined up to unload on Maine Prairie schooners. The next year, 1862, a devastating flood (the same one that destroyed Rio Vista) inundated the town, and, with the coming of the railroad, it soon declined. In 1879, a historian sadly noted, "The town looks old; the buildings

are unpainted, rickety, dilapidated. A general air of lonesomeness and desolation seems to pervade the place and a stranger is glad to get away."

If the California Pacific Railroad could create towns and destroy others, it was itself not immune to adversity. Its competition was the large and powerful Central Pacific Railroad, which had the backing of the most powerful entrepreneurs in the West, men like Mark Hopkins, Collis P. Huntington, Leland Stanford, and Charles Crocker. On May 10, 1869, the Central Pacific workers, composed of competing crews of Chinese and Irish laborers, laid down the last piece of track at Promontory, Utah, and the transcontinental railroad was a fact of American history. Flushed with success, the Central Pacific bought out the California Pacific in 1871, setting the stage for the rapid growth and development of agriculture in Solano County. It was now possible for the Central Pacific Railroad to reach into the rich farmlands of Solano, especially its fruit orchards, to offer a transport service reaching across America to the eastern markets.

The impact of the railroad on the agricultural and economic life of the county was immediate and profound, as we shall see in the next chapter, but its effect on political life was no less substantial. Whether the railroad was called the California Pacific or the Central Pacific, all roads now led to Vallejo, and, with the completion of the final link at Promontory, the deep-water port of Vallejo could

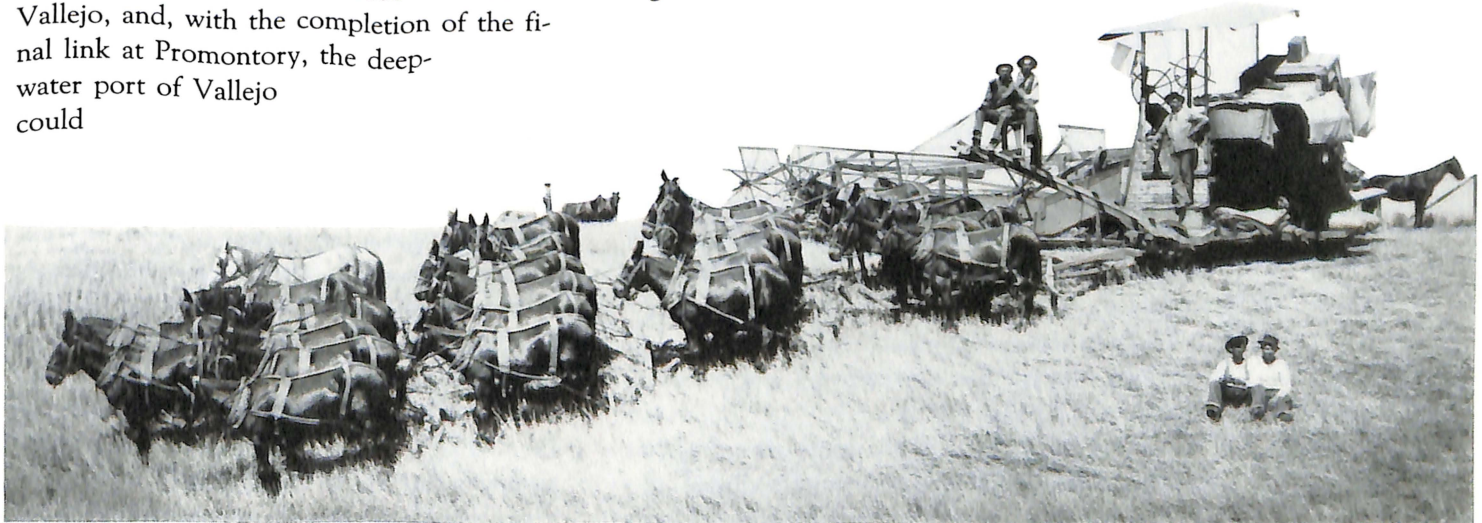
proudly claim to be the western terminus of the U.S. transcontinental railroad.

In addition to its strategic location, Vallejo was an increasingly important industrial hub. To service the railroad, it became the center for construction of railway cars, both passenger and freight, and for many dependant small businesses and contractors. Vallejo was also the terminal for the chief agricultural product of Solano County, wheat. The Starr Flour Mill was flourishing, as was the Vallejo Elevator, which stored grain by bulk—a huge landmark with a 118-foot smokestack and a separate building for the engine and boilers. The facility was capable of handling 35,000 bushels of wheat a day.

Beyond these private business enterprises lay the large naval base at Mare Island, growing larger with the construction and repair of U.S. ships, as well as foreign vessels contracting for its services. In 1870 a large hospital was built on Mare Island to serve the entire Pacific Squadron, while in 1872 a 528-foot-long dry dock costing over \$2 million was begun. And though the dry dock was not completed for many years, the constant, if irregular, construction served to strengthen the local economy.

Vallejo's status had changed radically from 1852 when the state lawmakers found the city so lacking in civil

This 18-horse mule team is seen drawing a harvester in the Maine Prairie area. Note the white horse. Most large teams had a white horse as a sign of good luck. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library



and social amenities that they moved the state capital to Sacramento, and had changed also from 1853 when they once again moved the capital, this time to nearby rival, Benicia. By the 1870s Vallejo had over 6,000 people, and it looked longingly toward a rosy political future as the county seat of Solano—an achievement sure to erase the stigma of its previous defeats.

The originator of the county seat plan was E.H. Sawyer, who owned much property in Vallejo, and who was strongly supported by the wealthy and powerful Captain John B. Frisbie. On June 14, 1873, a mass meeting was held in Farragut Hall and Captain Frisbie outlined the reasons for the change of location from Fairfield. In words that sound very like those hurled against the city of Vallejo only a short twenty years before, Frisbie charged that Fairfield had "an entire lack of accommodations," and he added, "We cannot compare the dreary, treeless plain upon which our county seat is located with the pleasant location of other counties without a feeling of shame."

Describing Fairfield as a "dreary, treeless plain" was, however, a negative argument, and Frisbie and his associates were progressive leaders who saw the issue in more positive terms. Frisbie noted that Fairfield might have been a good central location for a county when "people came from all parts of the county in carriages and on horseback," but, he noted, "the days of the stage coaches are past." He continued, "New means of travel have sprung up, and geographical centers have given way to centers of travel." With the coming of the railroad, it was clear to John Frisbie that the geography of Solano County had shifted, and the facts seemed to support him: in contrast to the 6,000 citizens in Vallejo in 1873, there were less than 400 people living in Fairfield.

The County Board of Supervisors declared that an election be held on November 26, 1873, and Vallejo won by over

300 votes; Vallejo tallied 2,279 to 1,939 for Fairfield.

The reaction to the vote, however, was immediate and negative, especially in the state legislature where it was charged that over 600 illegal votes had been cast in Vallejo (and 300 in Fairfield). Many declared the election null and void, and a group known as the "Divisionites" soon formed, headed by the Solano pioneer and former state senator, Lansing B. Mizner. They proposed that Vallejo and the rest of Solano County had "fallen out," and the only proper remedy was the creation of a separate county for Vallejo. Since they could not live together—so ran the argument—let them live apart with the proud city of Vallejo composing its own county.

After many recriminations and much debate, Senate Bill 301 was introduced on February 25, 1874. By the end of March both the senate and the assembly had passed the bill, and it became law. The victory, however, was brief, for in their haste to draft what became known as "The Insult Bill," the lawmakers had placed the new county of Vallejo in the 17th Senatorial District along with Tuolumne and Calaveras counties, which violated the state constitutional requirement that such jurisdictions be composed of contiguous counties. Governor Newton Booth vetoed Bill 301.

It has been suggested that, at this impasse, Governor Booth himself proposed returning the county seat to Fairfield. Whether true or not, the governor did sign such a bill on March 30, 1874. The brouhaha was over, and as historian Marguerite Hunt has noted, "Thus was Vallejo forced to yield the county seat of government even as, a couple of decades before, she had been deprived of the state capital."

If the power and influence of the railroad did not result in a political victory for the city of Vallejo, it did have a profound and enduring effect on the agricultural and economic life of the entire county. As the rail-



Although steamboats were highly developed, sail remained the cheapest means for transporting large loads over long distances. Here the four-mast schooner Solano is seen taking on a load of small tugboats. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

road ran south to the port of Vallejo, Solano wheat was loaded to full-rigged ships bound for Liverpool to feed a hungry Europe during its wars and famines; as it ran north to Sacramento and beyond to the East, it carried the abundant fruit harvests of the Green, Suisun, Vaca and Pleasants valleys to the burgeoning markets of the great cities of the American Midwest and the Atlantic Seaboard. Iron rails had truly made Solano the crossroads county.

The problem of rapid transportation

had now been solved for Solano's farmers and businessmen, but there was still needed another element for success, a cheap laboring class. Again the railroad provided the answer. With the completion of the transcontinental line and other smaller rail lines, there emerged a large unemployed group of Chinese laborers. The growth of new immigrant workers and the rise in fruit production in Solano County would proceed hand in hand to shape the people and their institutions.



This large and very busy packing house, part of the California Canning Company in Dixon, reflects the height of hand labor productivity before the modern assembly line came into being. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library

VI

THE EARLY FRUIT DISTRICT, EDUCATION, AND TOWN LIFE

If in the past Solano County had been known for the illustrious heritage bequeathed by General Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo and his unusual alliance with Sem-Yeto, chief of the Suisunes, for its political rivalries and the unique distinction of having two state capitals, for its deep-water ports and heavy industry in Vallejo and Benicia, it would be known in the latter part of the nineteenth century as the center of California's fresh fruit district. Its fame would reach across the country as one of the most fertile agricultural regions in the United States, and California could

claim—as it did in an 1892 pamphlet of the California Board of Trade—to be the “Orchard of America.” A large part of that orchard was Solano County.

From the beginning farmers had noted the excellent climate, available water, and rich, alluvial soil. They had also noted that the harvest season was long, from April to November. In the foothills of the Vaca Mountains and in Pleasants Valley, fruit matured earlier than on the valley floor because it was protected from the harsh winds and damp fogs from the west. One of the most famous of the early orchardists, Frank B. McKevitt, called this feature of Solano agriculture “extreme earliness.”

It is to [its] peculiar location that the valley owes its extreme earliness. The general direction of the high range of foothills or mountains to the west of the valley is northwest, shutting off the strong trade winds from the Pacific . . . and the fogs which drift in from that direction. Thus shut in, it is at once seen how thoroughly protected these valleys are, and the reason why it is here possible to grow the very early fruit for which they are justly famous.

McKevitt was speaking of the Vaca Valley and what later became known as “The Early Fruit District.” The first crops were cherries that ripened in April, followed in May by apricots and peaches, with plums, pears, and grapes in June—though the pear and grape harvests extended well into the fall. In no other part of the nation did fruit ripen so early and mature so late.

The Bucktown packing shed is seen here in about 1886. Frank Buck is the man wearing the pith helmet. Behind him is a fruit wagon fully loaded with field lugs of fruit to be processed. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council (Vacaville Library Collection)



Professor Edward J. Wickson of the University of California noted in 1888 that Solano's fruit, being nonirrigated, traveled well; its "carrying quality" enabled it to last longer in reaching distant markets.

Yet it was not at all clear a decade before Wickson's observations that the future of Solano agriculture lay with fresh fruit. Wheat was the dominant crop, and it had the obvious advantage of not spoiling. In the early 1880s there was an intense debate about the virtues of maintaining a wheat crop against the risks of planting a fruit orchard.

One of the men who helped settle the question in favor of fruit was A.T. Hatch, who purchased 120 acres of Suisun Valley land near Rockville in 1871. After a year or two of planting wheat, he discovered that even with a good harvest he only broke even. But nearby, on the land recently purchased, were three pear trees that in one year brought in \$75. Hatch made up his mind, and, by 1875, all of his 120 acres were planted in trees and vines.

By 1880, Hatch's trees were bearing fruit, and he purchased additional acres. By 1888, Hatch had acquired what was described as "the world's largest

orchard"—over 800 acres planted in almonds, cherries, peaches, pears, plums, prunes, apricots, figs, grapes, and nectarines. One Solano County trade brochure noted, "There is not a seed or blade of grass to be seen in this whole orchard." In addition, Hatch had 1,200 acres in San Joaquin, Placer, and Butte counties. The day of the commercial orchard had arrived.

Despite the success of A.T. Hatch in Suisun Valley, it was in the Vaca Valley that the commercial success of the fruit industry of Solano County was most fully realized. One of the first and most far-seeing of the orchardists was Leonard W. Buck, who purchased a 156-acre plot in northwest Vaca Valley in 1875 and planted peaches. Leonard Buck was one of the first California growers to ship fruit to the East. In 1882 he was elected to the state senate, and his son, Frank H. Buck, took over the management of the orchard; under his direction, the Buck Company became the largest shipping firm in the area.

Shortly thereafter, in 1877, the Alexander McKevitt family moved from New York and purchased land near the Buck farm. The teenage son, Frank McKevitt, soon took charge of the orchard, and his



Apricot halves are seen here drying at the Bucktown yard in 1887. The "cots" were cut in half, laid out on trays, run through the sulphur house to help cure them and keep their color, and finally dried in the sun. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council (Vacaville Library Collection)

name became widely known both as an orchardist and shipper.

Further north in the Pleasants Valley, the Sacramento attorney and judge, James R. English, owned much land that he had received in lieu of legal fees for his services. Though the English Hills derive their name from Judge English, it was his grandson, Clement Madison Hartley, who managed the orchards and established a packing shed along a railroad spur known as Hartley's Station. Other influential Vaca Valley fruit growers of the time included the Scotsman William Boyd Parker, the William Brazelton family, the Burton brothers (James H. and Richard E.) and the English immigrant Charles Mudge Chubb.

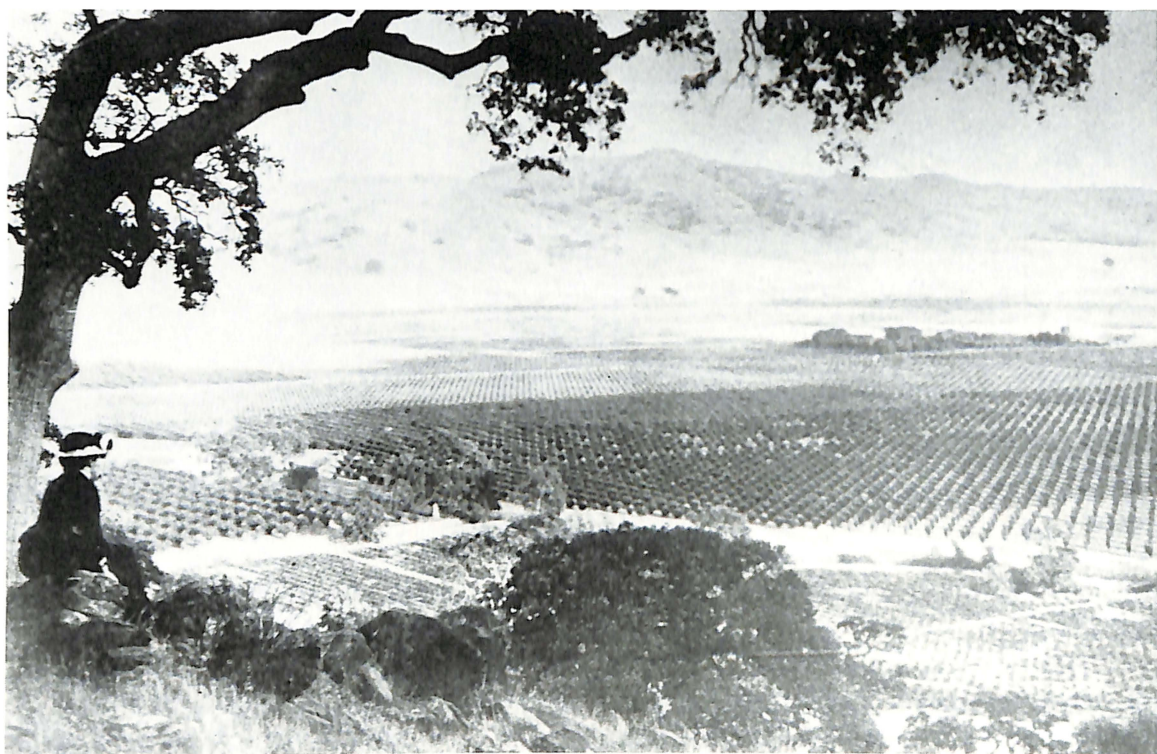
High on the list of successful Solano fruit growers would be the name of Elise P. Buckingham, who moved from San Francisco to Laguna Valley where she purchased 200 acres from one of the Peña heirs, Jose Demetrio Peña, and called it "Lagunita Rancho." A few years later she purchased 1,000 more acres, then sold half the land for a price more than she had paid for the entire tract. She was a most successful farm manager and investor, and her trees were soon yielding over 600 tons of fruit each year. In 1888, after visiting her extensive orchards, Professor Wickson noted that "she carried a philanthropic motive in her undertaking," and added:

She knows how women sometimes tire of the exactions of society or grow restless in the bonds of conventionality . . . how crowded are the ranks of vocations conventionally considered women's work. . . . Herein we have a key to some of the thoughts Mrs. Buckingham cherishes to lead women to recognize their own ability and strength, to lead them to action rather than restlessness and repining, to demonstrate that a woman can succeed in horticulture even when the affair is extended and complex and great interests involved.

Success in the orchards did not, however, guarantee commercial success, for the fruit also required packing and shipping and a steady market of consumers. The railroad offered the best means for reaching the eastern markets as John Patton Lyon demonstrated when he shipped a carload of grapes from Pleasants Valley to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876. Even without refrigeration, the grapes arrived in good condition, resulting in a sizable profit.

What was now needed was a regular and dependable system enabling Solano's fruit to reach Eastern markets. In 1885 A.T. Hatch and Leonard Buck provided it by establishing the California Fruit Union (CFU), which was an important advance in fruit marketing. The grower was now free ei-

*Elise P. Buckingham
oversees her
"Lagunita Rancho"
sometime around
1886. Her ranch
house is located
amidst the dark group
of trees to the right.
Courtesy, Vacaville
Heritage Council
(Vacaville Library
Collection)*



ther to ship with the CFU or select among several private shippers, like the Early Fruit Company, the Pioneer Fruit Company, or the Frank H. Buck Company. Even with vast drying yards, Vaca Valley would ship a thousand railroad cars or more of fresh fruit to the East during its most productive years.

Perhaps the most important technological advance occurred in 1889 when the refrigerator car was first used to transport fresh fruit. Again, it was a combination of A.T. Hatch and Leonard W. Buck who made the experiment, which, after a first-year disaster in which the growers lost \$10,000, became a huge success.

The achievements of the fresh fruit industry in Solano County were due to many factors, like natural resources, agricultural skills, and the coming of the railroad, but they were also due to the availability of workers, the laborers who picked and packed the fruit. That availability was assured in the 1870s when work on the railroads and in the mines declined, and large numbers of

Chinese moved into Solano's orchards looking for work.

The Chinese had been steady immigrants into California from the Gold Rush days, and they were assigned jobs in the most menial and burdensome areas of frontier life: digging in the mines, building levees, terracing land, and providing domestic and seasonal farm labor. In the 1870s a tenth of California's population was Chinese, and in one year alone, 1876, 22,000 Chinese immigrants arrived in San Francisco.

In the beginning, there was little opposition as the Chinese took over the least desirable tasks, but as their numbers grew, they were attacked for taking work away from white laborers, especially when jobs were scarce. As the immigration figures increased, the voices of opposition grew louder. In 1882 was passed the Chinese Exclusion Act, which prohibited Chinese immigration; 10 years later, the act was extended.

It is estimated that there were 1,500

Chinese in the township of Vacaville in 1885, and that well over half the labor force was Chinese. They were well-regarded as farm workers, and orchardist Frank B. McKevitt wrote:

These people furnish ideal laborers for horticultural pursuits. The Chinaman cannot be classed as a rapid worker, but he begins his work with rather a deliberate motion which is kept up continuously throughout the day and is just the same at night as in the morning. For work like picking and packing fruit this characteristic is a valuable one.

And the Chinese would accept meager wages. In 1866 the "Celestials," as they were called, worked for a dollar a day, and the *Solano Press* noted, "these wages will

likely be reduced." In opposition to the prevailing anti-Chinese agitation of the time, the Vacaville Fruit Growers Association passed a resolution in 1886 urging caution in removing Chinese farm workers and condemning the extremism against them.

The second large Asian work force in the Vaca Valley were the Japanese, who arrived in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Frank McKevitt wrote:

The Japanese are good laborers in the orchards and vineyards. They are bright and enterprising and are much quicker in their motions than the Chinese. They are also very ambitious, and this fact has raised them from the rank of laborers to that of employees.

McKevitt's statement was accurate. In

A number of fruit industry pioneers from the Vacaville area posed for this picture in 1894. Pictured are John R. Wolfskill, M.R. Miller, J.M. Pleasants, E.R. Thurber, Richard Long, and E. Rust. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council (Vacaville Library Collection)





This picture shows what may have been the first trainload of fruit to leave Vacaville under refrigeration. It was the pioneer use of the refrigerator car which opened the Eastern market to early Vacaville fruit. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council (Vacaville Library Collection)

the year 1902, 14 years after their first arrival, Japanese owned 350 acres in Vaca Valley, and they rented 6,300 acres, about one-third of the total orchard land in the valley. The Japanese moved beyond the farm into the town of Vacaville where they set up their own district and established stores. A labor report of 1906 indicated that six Japanese stores controlled more than half the town's general trade and 90 percent of the important farm supply business. Vacaville was being described in newspapers as a "Tokyo suburb" with a permanent Japanese population of 1,000 persons, increasing to 2,000 at harvest time.

There were other laboring groups besides the Chinese and Japanese, including whites, Negroes, Filipinos, Hindus, Mexicans, and Spaniards. Yet, during the boom time of the Early Fruit District in Vaca Valley, it was Oriental labor that picked and packed at harvest time and contributed mightily to the success of commercial orchards in Solano County.

The growth of agriculture in Vaca Valley led naturally enough to the further development of town life and the expansion of schools, churches, and fraternal organizations. Vacaville itself had already achieved an enviable reputation as a town with strong educational interests. The Pacific

Methodist College (South) was founded in 1861 and was led by President William T. Lucky, who also won fame as a powerful temperance preacher. The college became embroiled in disputes over its political loyalty to the Confederacy a few years after its founding, and part of the college was destroyed by a mysterious fire in 1863, a few weeks after the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. The main building endured, however, and became the site of California College, which was run by the Baptist Church and flourished from 1871 to 1881. Later, the same building housed the California Normal and Scientific School.

Solano County could also boast of several outstanding public educators. The second superintendent of schools, James W. Anderson, went on to serve in that position in San Francisco (1887-1894) and, finally, as California's superintendent of public instruction (1891-1894). Probably the most influential of Solano's superintendents was Calvin B. Webster, who served from 1883 to 1891 and who published his *Education History of Solano County* in 1888. At that time the county had 54 school districts and 96 schools, and Superintendent Webster visited each of them annually. The May 23, 1890, edition of the *Daily Republican* endorsed Webster for reelection and



Chinese field workers are depicted here working on a ranch near Vacaville. They are probably harvesting Tokay grapes. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

noted, "Mr. Webster has built up the schools of this county to a standard second to that of no other county in this state."

One famous graduate of Vacaville Township schools was the poet Edwin Markham, who grew up on his mother's ranch in Lagoon Valley and attended Pacific Methodist College before leaving for the Christian College in Santa Rosa from which he graduated in the mid-1870s. Yet Markham never forgot his boyhood in the Suisun hills, as the poem "The Heart's Return" suggests:

*I cannot ever be so sad But one thing still will
make me glad— That hid spring in the Suisun
hills; My heart goes back to it thru all the
earthly ills.*

The prosperity and commerce represented by the Early Fruit District of Vaca Valley resulted also in the growth of the town itself. In the early 1880s there was much

new construction, and elegant homes were being erected to match the expansion of downtown businesses. Yet Vacaville sustained several serious fires during this period of development. The first occurred in June 1877 and about half the business district was lost; a few months later, in October, another fire destroyed almost the rest of the downtown area. Yet Vacaville rebuilt. In 1888 twin fires again ruined the business district, first in August, then in November. Fire was indeed a plague in early California towns, yet Vacaville managed always to rise again.

In their remarkable book, *Vacaville, the Heritage of a California Community*, authors Limbaugh and Payne note the contrast between Vacaville and nearby Elmira, which also suffered a series of fires in the 1880s but did not rebuild with the same vigor and ambition. They also point out that Suisun City surrendered some of its prominence to Vacaville because the railroad,

The Pacific Methodist College in Vacaville was the first college to be established in the Sacramento Valley. After burning in 1864, the college was replaced by the California College seen here sometime around 1880. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council (Vacaville Library Collection)



rather than water transport, provided faster service, especially for fresh fruit.

Yet, from the days of its founding in 1851 by Captain Josiah Wing to the heydays of the agricultural boom in the Vaca Valley, Suisun City never completely lost its commercial importance as a trading and shipping center. It was incorporated in 1868 and continued to provide a key transportation link to central Solano County. A main reason was its location on the Suisun slough and its embarcadero, which maintained a regular shipping schedule. Transportation was further improved in 1878 when the Central Pacific Railroad finally completed a 17-mile line between Suisun City and Benicia after years of unsuccessful efforts to fill in the "Suisun sink"; hundreds of rail cars dumped tons of ballast which were swallowed up before a sufficient foundation was laid for the sturdy rails.

By the 1880s Suisun City offered two forms of transport, by rail and by water, and the competition between them resulted in a lowering of Suisun City rates as compared to Vacaville. In 1894, for example, the rate charged Vacaville shippers to San

Francisco was twice what was charged to Suisun City shippers who had the option of water transport. Aware of these differences, large dryers and packers like J.K. Armsby and Ernest Luehning established huge plants between Suisun City and Fairfield, employing as many as 600 persons for six months of the year.

Suisun City had also the power and influence of the county newspaper. When the county seat moved from Benicia to Fairfield in 1858, the *Solano County Herald* moved from Benicia to Suisun City. In 1869 the name was changed to the *Solano Republican*, and it remained in Suisun before moving to Fairfield in the 1920s. Other signs of progress in Suisun City by 1880 were the presence of five physicians, three dentists, and three blacksmiths—sure evidence that both town life and farm life were vigorous. It was also the center of banking, and its proximity to Fairfield, the county seat, gave it additional civic importance.

Suisun City has always been fortunate in its location, first on the waterway and later on the railway line. After passing from Suisun City to Benicia, Central Pacific

trains crossed the Carquinez Strait on the largest ferry in the world, the *Solano*. It was 424 feet long by 116 feet wide and could carry either two locomotives with 24 passenger cars or two locomotives with 36 freight cars. From 1879 to 1930, the *Solano* plied between Benicia and Port Costa in Contra Costa County, and was regarded as one of the "Wonders of the World"; some even maintained that her mammoth size was so awesome that when she docked, it seemed as if the San Francisco skyline itself was tying up at Benicia.

Though Benicia by this time had suffered political disappointments, first by losing the state capital (1854) and then the county seat (1858), it had never relinquished its social and cultural position among the towns and cities of Solano County. Indeed, Benicia had so many excellent educational institutions that it was known as the "Athens of California." It might also be called the "mother of colleges," for both Mills College in Oakland and Dominican College in San Rafael had their origins in Benicia.

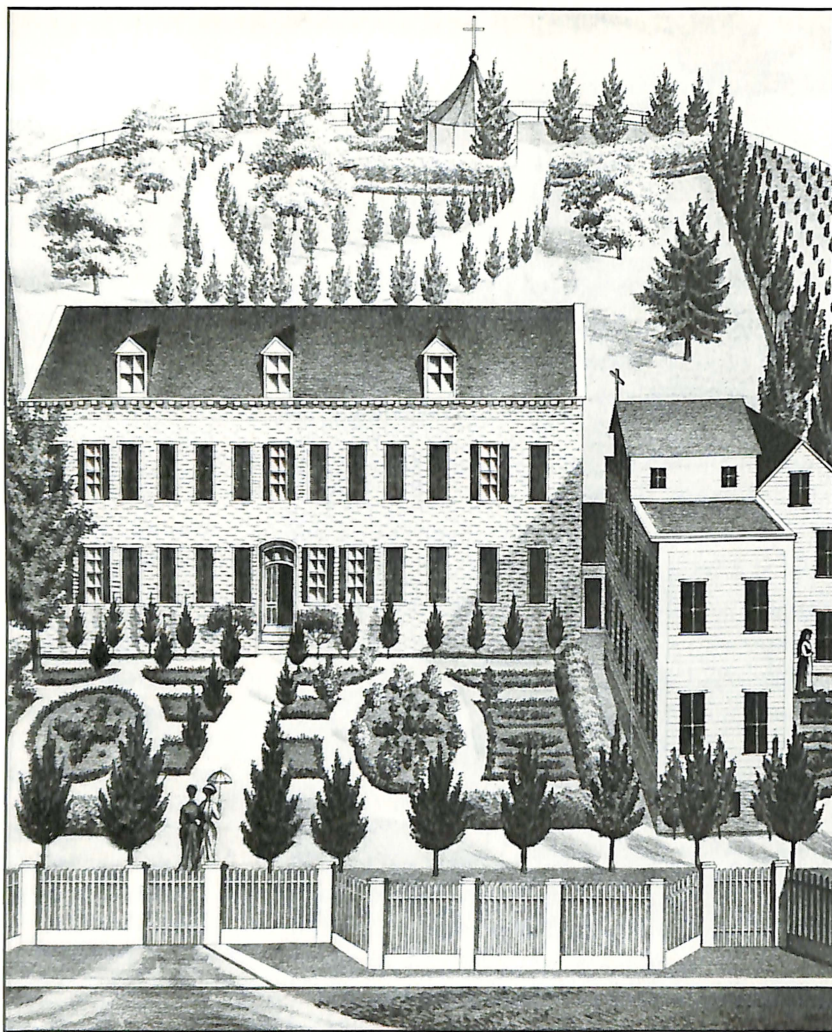
The first girls' school in the West, the Young Ladies Seminary, was opened in Benicia in 1852 under the auspices of the Presbyterian minister, the Reverend Sylvester Woodbridge. Three years later, in 1855, it was purchased by Mary Atkins, who became widely known in California as a leading educator. In 1865 the Reverend Cyrus Mills and his wife, Susan, bought the Seminary and administered it until 1870 when they moved to Oakland to found Mills College. In 1878 the old seminary was re-opened and again purchased by Mary Atkins, and it survived her death in 1882 before closing in 1886.

The Catholics established the second private school in Solano County. Invited by San Francisco's Archbishop Joseph Alemany, Dominican nuns from France opened St. Catherine's School in 1854, and it remained in Benicia until 1888 when the nuns moved the school, the convent, and motherhouse, to San Rafael to establish Dominican College.

The most famous nun in California history resided at St. Catherine's School. Her

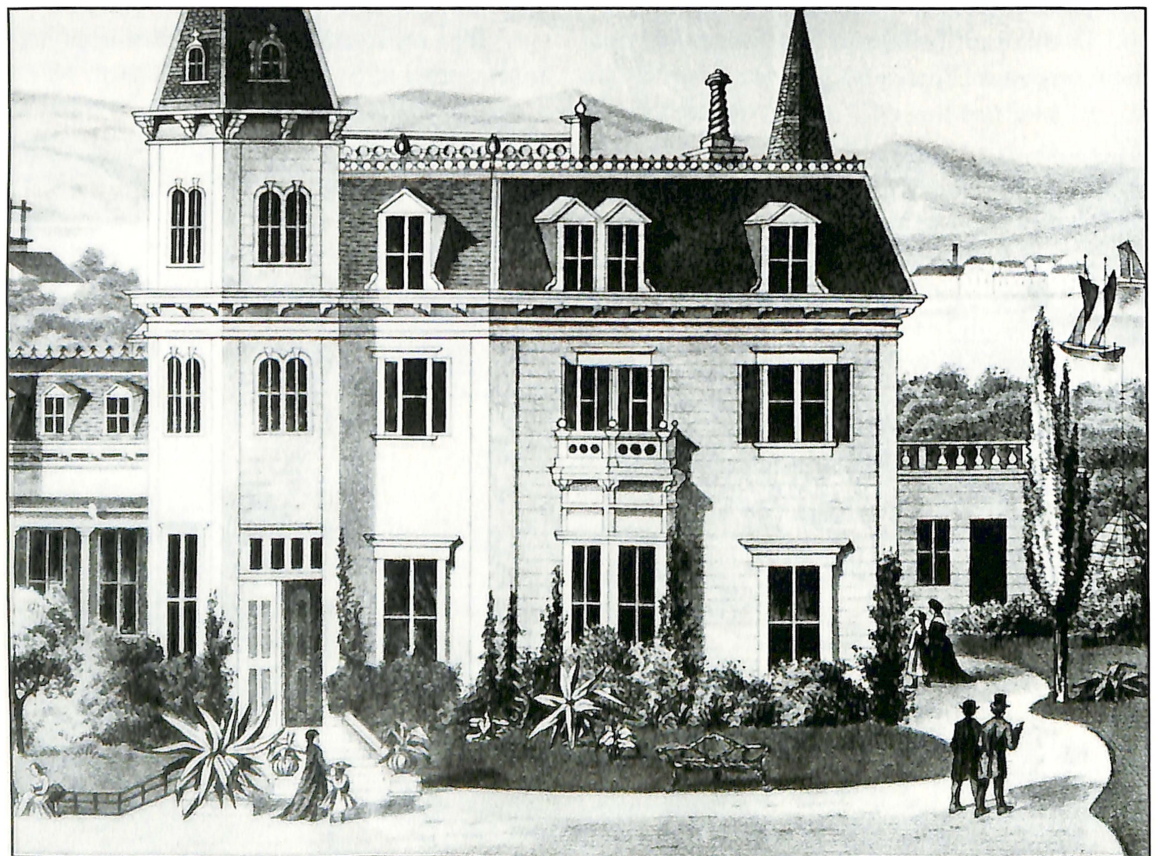


The Good Templars Orphanage was the largest building in Vallejo. It was built in 1869 on a hilltop called "Vista de Vallejo." It later became the largest primary school in Vallejo, serving both as an orphanage and school. It was razed in 1919. Courtesy, Ernest Wichels Collection



Above: St. Catherine's School in Benicia is shown here in an illustration from 1877. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

Right: St. Mary's of the Pacific Academy was established in Benicia in 1870. The famous novelist Gertrude Horn Ather-ton attended this school. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



name was Maria de la Concepcion Arguello, the daughter of the Spanish *comandante* of San Francisco's presidio, who fell in love with the visiting Russian envoy, Nicholai Petrovich Resanov, in 1806 and who waited faithfully for his return for 35 years when she finally learned of his untimely death returning to Russia from California so many years before. This famous love story was the subject of many works by California writers, including the poet Bret Harte. Maria Arguello became a Dominican nun in 1851, and she is buried in St. Dominic's Cemetery in Benicia.

The Episcopalians founded the College of St. Augustine for boys in 1868, which grew out of Charles Blake's boarding school begun in 1852, and in 1870 they established St. Mary's of the Pacific for girls. Many famous Californians attended these two schools, as well as pupils from abroad. Among the Californians was Gertrude Horn



Atherton, the novelist and early feminist who once wrote, "I have never married a second time as I prize liberty and freedom too much to sacrifice to any man."

Benicia was indeed a center of education and culture in Solano County almost to the turn of the century. It boasted a salubrious climate as well as the absence of distractions, as a 1862 newspaper account attests:

Benicia is a small town and presents nothing to distract the attention of students. There are no theatres or places of public amusement to draw them away from study. When they want relaxation, they can find nothing better than their own playground.

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, Solano County had developed in a short 50 years into a progressive region which had attained both the virtues of agricultural life and the refinements of city life.

A fitting symbol of its achievements was the gold trophy awarded to Solano County in 1894 at the California Midwinter International Exposition for the best ex-

hibit of farm produce. Solano's entry emphasized the great variety of its dried fruits and nuts displayed around a representation of Chief Solano and the old state capitol building in Benicia. The gold cup itself, emblazoned with precious jewels, was exhibited for several years in the Ferry Building in San Francisco until it was stolen by an unknown thief, and its whereabouts today remains a mystery.

Nonetheless a description of the trophy remains, and it contained four medals representing the "Fine Arts, Manufactures and Liberal Arts, and the Agricultural and Horticultural Buildings [of the Exposition]." It was indeed fitting that Solano County was awarded the first prize in 1894, for its achievements in all the arts—agricultural, mechanical and liberal—were truly outstanding, and it embodied them in the highest degree.

No California county could surpass Solano in the variety of its accomplishments in the fields of farming, transportation, shipping, maritime and industrial power. And in selected areas, like the cultivation of fresh fruit and the higher learning, Solano County had no peer.

The Vacaville High School (left) and Ula-tis Grammar School (right) are both visible in this view from about 1910. Vacaville, as with most other Solano towns, was proud of its fine schools. Note the large flag above the grammar school bell tower. Smaller schools had separate flagpoles. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council (Vacaville Library Collection)



Robert Duncan's private band represented Solano County at the California State Fair in the late 1920s. Nearly every school in Solano County had a marching band, but due to a money shortage none could participate at the fair. "The Kilties" had this honor. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library

VII

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Solano County was a quiet and reflective region that seemed turned in upon itself, as if digesting the many achievements of the previous century. Newspapers of the time depict townships and citizens concerned with the enrichment of their communi-

ties, though still willing to try new commercial ventures.

The *Solano Republican* noted in its January 25, 1901, edition that the Suisun City Improvement Club's first invitation to the women of the town had been so successful that half those in attendance "belonged to the fair sex." The women remained, and by 1906 the club had been renamed "The Women's Improvement Club." And improvements occurred. Sidewalks were repaired and electric streetlights installed. Macadam and asphalt replaced the muddy streets of Solano's cities and towns, while social clubs emerged to provide the setting for musical and literary events. Solano also attracted sportsmen, hunters, and fishermen from San Francisco and the Bay Area, who caught the fighting salmon off the waters near Rio Vista, and bagged the mallard and teal that nested in the marshes and sloughs. Described as "city capitalists," these sportsmen leased hunting preserves at a time when the limit for ducks was 50 per hunter.

But however active were Solano citizens in improving and enjoying the present, they never neglected their past. The custodian of its history was most often the local newspaper, which either reprinted earlier works or assigned writers to retell the famous early history of the county. The *Solano Republican*, for example, prepared several lengthy accounts in the first decades of the century. In 1906 a number of installments carried the county's history as it had been recorded in the early pages of the *Republican*, and in 1931 a weekly column was devoted to selections from J.P. Monro-Fraser's 1879 *History of Solano County*.

Yet the county could never be charged with living only in the past. In 1902, a venture known as the Armijo Oil Company was drilling for oil in the Suisun foothills, while a 1903 newspaper story stated that "Suisun (City) can truthfully boast of being the most active town of its size in central California." And in 1913, not far from Suisun City, a new town called "Solano City" was being promoted with over a 1,000 people attending the opening ceremonies of the townsite, which claimed to have 30 blocks already laid out. A local entrepreneur declared, "We are not going to boom a city, we are going to build one."

One reason for the optimism was the hope embodied in the new electric rail system, which had proved successful elsewhere. Solano County was espe-



The Snowball Club chartered this train for one of its outings. Social clubs were very popular, and often very exclusive. The Wieland Club was another such social club.

Courtesy, Ernest Wichels Collection

cially dependent upon transportation systems, for its centers of commerce were widely separate and any means of linking them was desirable. Electric trains had two distinct advantages over the steam trains; they were cleaner and quieter, and better suited for an age of refinement. As early as 1904 Colonel J.W. Hartnell of Illinois, backed by British capitalists, sought permission to build 80 miles of track linking Vallejo, Suisun, Vacaville, and Dixon. Hartnell's death in 1905 ended this enterprise, but part of his route was selected by the Vallejo and Northern Railway Co., known as the V & N. Despite many delays, the V & N completed the tracks between Vacaville and Suisun City by late 1913, and regular service began in 1914 with four round trips daily.

The electric train never did fulfill its promise in Solano County because, unlike the earlier California Pacific and Southern Pacific lines, it never developed a complete

transportation system across the county. And while the steam trains could handle both freight and passengers, the electric trains were best suited for passenger travel only. But the chief reason for its limited success, as we shall soon see, was the emergence of the automobile, which, in the early decades of the century provided the most economical and popular form of transportation.

Even remote portions of the county were centers of business, agriculture, and vigorous town life. In the north, the town of Dixon erected a public library in 1912 with funds from Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish philanthropist. Dixon was widely known as the "Dairy City," and Henry R. Timm ran a large herd of registered Jersey and Holstein cows that was described as the largest certified dairy herd in the United States. And to the east on the Sacramento River, the town of Rio Vista prospered through a combination of agricultural produce and wa-

ter traffic; its facilities accommodated the largest of vessels. The river town also remained the center of salmon fishing, both for sportsmen and commercial canners, while it maintained St. Gertrude's Academy for Girls since 1876 when the Sisters of Mercy established it. Later, when the St. Joseph Military Academy for Boys began, Rio Vista became the educational center of eastern Solano County.

In the southern part of the county, the presence of the Mare Island Naval Yard ensured an active economy for the city of Vallejo. The Yard had never been dormant even in the years before World War I. Between 1912 and 1916 at least one, and sometimes several, ships had been built each year, while scores of others were repaired or reconditioned.

Mare Island's largest shipbuilding assignment was proclaimed in banner headlines in the December 10, 1915, *Vallejo Times* with the announcement that it had won the contract for building the first super-dreadnought on the Pacific Coast, Battleship #44, which would be christened almost four years later as the *USS California*. It was a huge vessel—600 feet long and 97 feet wide—weighing 32,000 tons and with a crew of 1,200 men. Its final cost would be \$15 million, more than the combined cost of the 27 craft that Mare Island had built in the previous 60 years.

Mare Island's first destroyer, the *USS Shaw*, was launched in December 1916, and in the two war years of 1917 and 1918 the Yard would build an additional seven destroyers. One, the *USS Ward* would set a record which has never been broken: completion in 17 1/2 days. The keel was laid on May 15, 1918, and she slid into the water on June 1, a Saturday evening, after which there were speeches, a parade, and dancing in Vallejo's streets until midnight. An estimated 6,000 people joined in the celebration of a world's record in shipbuilding. Appropriately, the *USS Ward* was christened by Dorothy Ward,

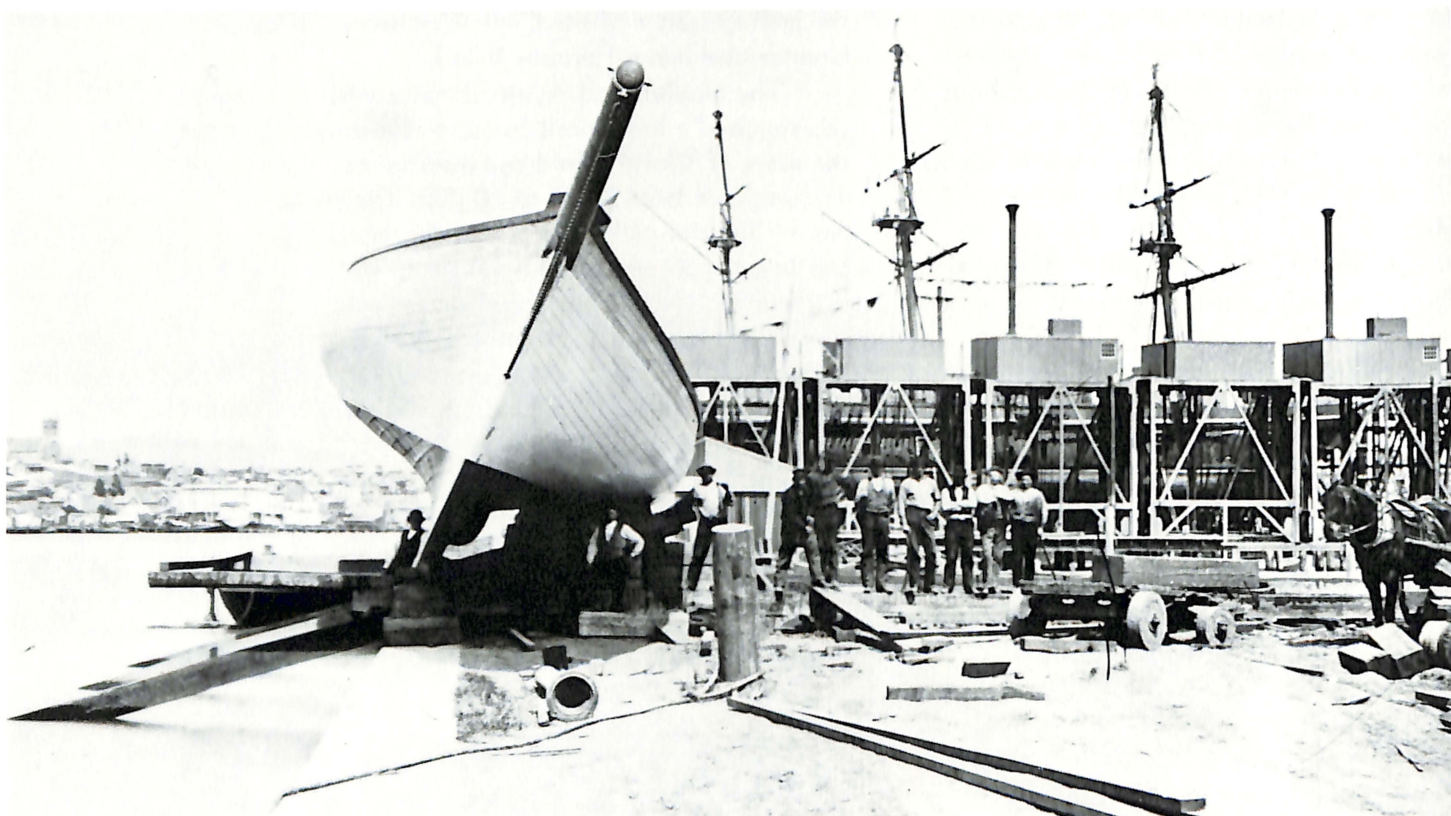
the granddaughter of the Civil War hero, Commander James Harmon Ward.

The building and repair of naval vessels required a huge work force, and during the years of World War I the number of workers grew from 3,000 to 10,000. The effect on the city of Vallejo was immense, and living space was quickly taken up by workers and their families. Vallejo became also a workplace for commuters who lived in San Francisco and the Bay Area.

On Mare Island itself, training schools were established for U.S. sailors and Marines, and by August 1917, 8,000 enlisted men resided there. The number would rise to over 10,000 by the end of the war, and the hundreds of sailors and marines granted shore leave would create boom times for saloons, restaurants, and hotels. Though the en-

The electric train at the Vacaville Station was pictured with its conductor in this image from around 1920. Courtesy, Vacaville Museum





listed men often preferred San Francisco, their presence in Vallejo was frequent enough to improve economic life for many local businessmen. Nonetheless, there was a constant battle between temperance groups and the Naval authorities about the illegal sale of liquor, houses of prostitution, and

the need for more wholesome amusements and recreation.

If the war boom provided southern Solano County with economic growth, there were, nonetheless, other portions of the county that also prospered in these times. One such place was the city of Cement which was established in the early years of the century to mine tufa, a clay used in the making of cement.

Cement comprised approximately 900 acres, lying in the hills south of Laguna Valley just northeast of today's Fairfield. In the nineteenth century it was known as "Cement Hill," and the quarries yielded onyx and travertine used for decorative purposes and in the facades of buildings. The greater part of the deposits, however, was tufa, which encouraged the Portland Cement Company to establish a cement factory. Beginning with a mere 600-barrel capacity in 1902, it grew in 1907 to an output of 6,000 barrels a day, making it one of

the largest such operations in the West.

The town of Cement grew up around the cement factory, an active town for the families of the 500 full-time employees. Cement boasted a post office, hospital, two-room schoolhouse, firehouse, electric plant, livery stable, grocery store, and butcher shop. The original hotel burned down in 1906, and an elegant 175-room hotel with a wide veranda was then constructed. It could accommodate hundreds of guests, and a "Grand Ball" was held every year. The town of Cement lasted until the clay deposits were exhausted in 1927, but many people today remember it with affection and nostalgia.

Despite the pockets of prosperity in Solano County in the years before World War I, the county itself was a vast region that retained an insular character because there were no major roadways connecting it to larger metropolitan centers like Sacramento and San Francisco. Water transport and ferry service invited ready access to cities like Vallejo, Benicia, Suisun City, and Rio Vista, but the county's interior resembled nothing so much as an island.

Solano County had always been depen-

dent upon crossroads, first trails for horses and mules to the goldfields, then rails moving freight trains with fruit crops toward Eastern markets. The twentieth century would bring a new form of crossroads, which would open Solano's interior and transform its inland towns into small bustling cities. The new crossroad would be the paved highway.

In 1910 in all of California there were only 44,000 cars, but in 1919 there were 600,000 autos in the state. California has always had a special love affair with the automobile, but beyond the thrill of ownership, design, color, and the appeal to vanity lies the unarguable fact that California is an immense state requiring lengthy travel to traverse its vast expanse.

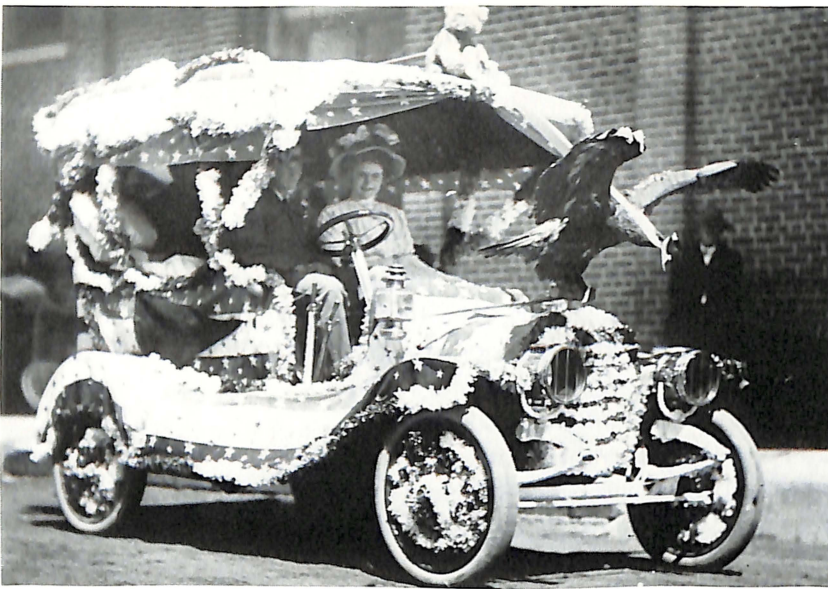
Solano County is also a huge area, and though it had its share of automobiles, it lacked highways. If one wanted to travel to Sacramento from San Francisco, one avoided Solano County and passed through the East Bay counties to Stockton and thence to the state capital. All this changed between 1912 and 1914 when the main highway through Solano County was constructed and later, in 1916, when the Yolo

Opposite page, top: Floating dry docks were an early and important feature of the naval shipyard at Mare Island. They allowed a ship to be serviced by raising it just above the water. This floating dry dock was constructed on the east coast and reassembled at Mare Island in 1855. Courtesy, Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum

Opposite page, bottom: The destroyer Ward, seen here in an image from 1918, was constructed in just over 17 days at the Mare Island Naval Shipyard. Courtesy, Mare Island Naval Shipyard Historical Archives



Left: The U.S. Navy Yeomanettes of World War I had their counterparts with the WAVES of World War II. They replaced the men on the home front while the "boys were away." Courtesy, Vallejo Naval & Historical Museum



Above: This car, complete with teddybear, was bound to take first place at the Dixon May Day Parade in the early 1900s. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library

Causeway was erected, which enabled automobiles to pass over the often flooded area of the Yolo Basin adjacent to the Sacramento River to enter Sacramento; until the Yolo Causeway was constructed, flooded areas would make the roads in northeastern Solano County impassable for up to six or eight months a year. Another link to outside cities like Lodi and Stockton was the erection of the Rio Vista Bridge. The *Solano Republican* of January 31, 1919, announced that "the Rio Vista Bridge across the Sacramento River is one of the largest structures west of the Mississippi."

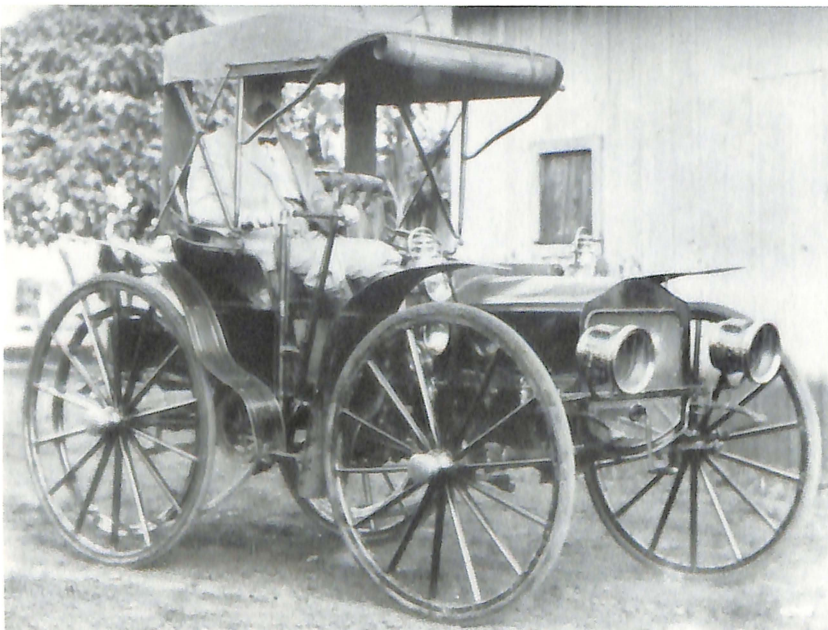
But the most important of the bridges into Solano County was the Carquinez Bridge, which opened May 21, 1927. It

was described in the *Solano County Courier* of May 19, 1927 as "the world's largest highway bridge representing an investment of \$8,000,000 and requiring four years to build, the bridge that links British Columbia with Mexico, uniting three flags." The Carquinez Bridge was built with private funds and investments in the American Toll Bridge Company organized by Aven Hanford, a grocery store owner in Vallejo and by Oscar Klatt, a grocery salesman from San Francisco. Enterprising men, Hanford and Klatt also built in the previous year the old Antioch Bridge, which spanned the San Joaquin River between Contra Costa and Sacramento counties. It was not until 1940 that the Carquinez Bridge was acquired by the State of California.

Not only did the Carquinez Bridge provide a crossroad into Solano County from the populated regions to the south, but it also ended the operation of the world's largest train and passenger ferry, the *Solano*. In the very year the bridge was completed, 1927, the *Solano* carried 98,000 passenger cars across the Carquinez Strait while the bridge carried a third that number, 34,000 cars, in one three-day period. The days of the *Solano* were numbered; she completed her last voyage on October 15, 1930.

No better index of the change that the automobile visited upon Solano County can be found than in the population figures of Suisun City and Fairfield. In 1910 Suisun City numbered 850 persons while Fairfield numbered only 800. But after the 1912-1914 development of the main highway that passed through Fairfield, rather than Suisun, the numbers shifted. In 1920, for the first time, the population of Fairfield surpassed Suisun City: 1,000 inhabitants as opposed to 875. From this point forward, the highways of Solano County would be the conduits for both wealth and social change as new crossroads would bring new people and new enterprises.

Solano's highways did not emerge overnight, and even the completion of the main



Below: Martin Jongeneel is seen here in his Duer horseless carriage. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum

county highway in 1912-1914 did not include much paved road; in 1920, apart from city streets, only about 25 miles of concrete paving led into and out of the main cities and towns. Little by little, however, the paving and rerouting advanced. In December 1936, construction began on realigning the road between Fairfield and Vacaville, eliminating 17 curves, and planning began that same year to realign the road between Vallejo and Cordelia through American Canyon, with a saving of six miles on the route to Sacramento.

Roadside businesses on Solano's interior highways would emerge in the coming decades, and the prototype was The Nut Tree, the most famous of Solano County restaurants. Almost a national landmark, The Nut Tree is the most familiar "pit stop" in northern California. Its success derives not only from its premier location on the road between San Francisco and Sacramento, but also because it offers for sale the very essence of Solano's famous agricultural produce--fresh fruit.

The Nut Tree began as a roadside stand under a large black walnut tree, the original "nut tree." As the number of automobiles increased on the main highway outside Vacaville, Helen Power, the wife of Edwin (Bunny) Power, decided to sell figs to passing motorists. The sale items soon included homemade bread and dried fruits and nuts packed in decorative burlap bags. Soon Edwin Power had developed original papier-mache packages designed in the shape of gold nuggets containing candied and glazed fruit mixtures, which he successfully marketed by the mid-1920s in major department stores in New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The Nut Tree Restaurant grew along with the marketing of nuts and fruit, and today it is a major stopping-off point for weary travelers across Solano County, still serving a California cuisine of natural foods and fresh fruits.

But it is ironic that at a time when consumers in America's largest cities were buying the pretty packages of Solano fruit sold

The sternwheel riverboat Capital City is seen here at the turn of the century plying its way up the Carquinez Strait. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum



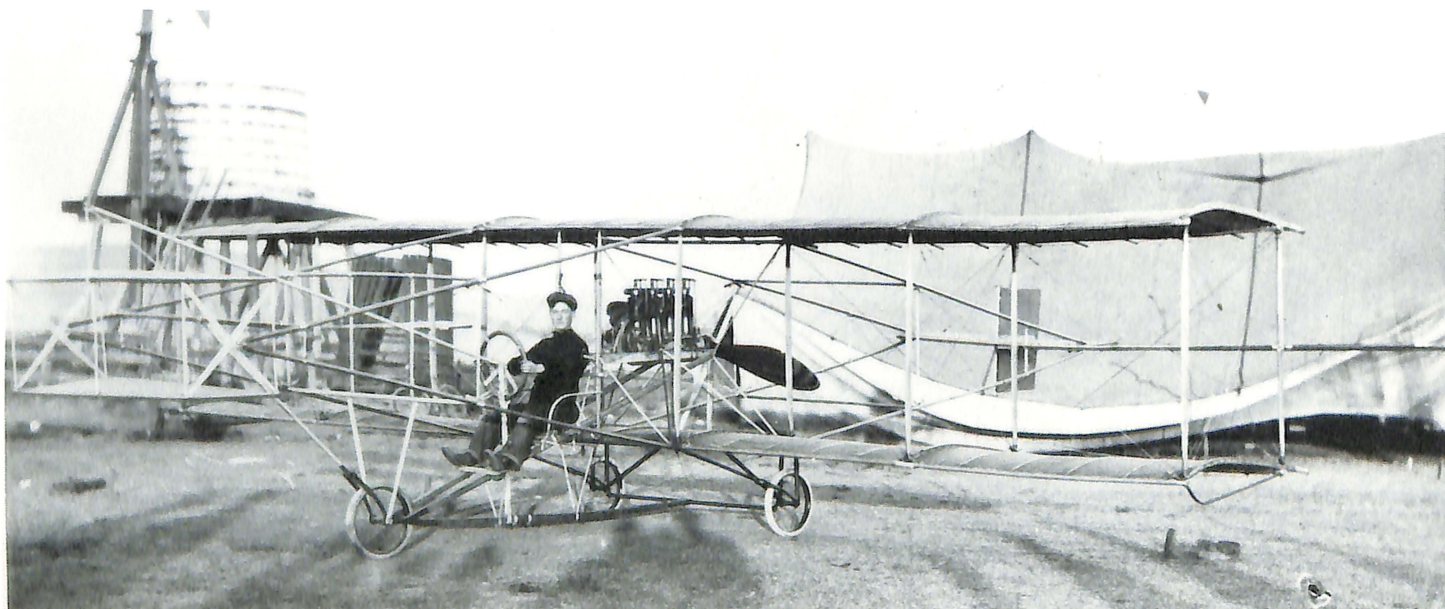
through The Nut Tree that the fruit industry itself was beginning to decline.

Even before the harsh Depression years of the 1930s, the farmers of the famous Vacaville Fruit District were suffering because of increased competition from the Central Valley, where larger and more attractive fruit had been produced through irrigation. Solano's smaller, nonirrigated fruit was less appealing to consumers, who preferred Central Valley fruit that was sometimes 50 percent larger. The response of some of Solano's farmers was to attempt irrigation, but it was expensive and often ineffective, because so many orchards were planted on hillsides. Another response was to produce more of the early fruit, which had been the hallmark of Vacaville's harvests. However, in hard economic times early fruit was a luxury for consumers and one of the first items on which to economize. Another solution of farmers in the 1920s and 1930s was to reduce the variety of their crops, and soon only the plum and prune were in heavy production. The days when the Vacaville and Suisun valleys produced a vast array of fruits—apricots, cherries, figs, peaches, pears, nectarines, grapes—were over.

In addition to the heavy competition of the larger fruit from the Central Valley, farmers also encountered higher and higher production costs as well as Southern Pacific freight rates they found excessive. Nature also seemed to take a hand in their misfortune through soil exhaustion and erosion. The valleys and hillsides of central Solano County had been in continual use for over half a century, and winter rains had swept topsoil away. Floods were another enemy, and denuded the soil in spite of efforts at control. Even the terracing of hillside orchards did not help. Nature seemed to deliver the cruelest of blows in 1930 when cherry orchards were hard hit with "Buckskin disease," which decimated most of them.

Even governmental solutions seemed hostile to recovery. In the early 1930s the Agricultural Adjustment Administration in Washington, D.C. set up statewide marketing agreements to help the farmer and consumer by restricting the sale of low quality produce to achieve higher prices. But since the color, shape, and date of ripening cannot readily be determined, the standard of size alone dominated all decisions. Once again, the smaller fruit of Solano County suffered in comparison with produce from the

This Curtiss Pusher, built by Paul Butler in 1911, represented Vallejo's first airplane. The pilot is Rueben Coombs. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



Central Valley. Even solutions from the past, like drying fruit, were insufficient, though orchardists like J.N. Rogers and C.J. Uhl built large processing plants for dehydrating fruit; the 25-ton dehydrator built in 1926 and managed by Ed Uhl was the largest in the county.

Though the Depression years were difficult for Solano County farmers, they still had the advantage of growing their own food, unlike the county's urban residents. Yet conditions were grim, and older residents, like Imogene Wilson, remember that "When the Depression started, it was like an earthquake . . . [yet] we kept our pride and not once asked for help." Another citizen of that time, Grace Robertson, recalled that "Maybe the lasting effects of the Depression might have done me some good . . . I still cannot waste anything." She still can remember a poem that the children sang at school:

Hoover blew the whistle, Mellon rang the bell,

Wall Street pulled the throttle, And the country went to hell!

The election of the Democrats and Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 brought also to the U.S. Congress a noted Vacaville native, Frank H. Buck, Jr., of the influential Buck family, who served for 10 years and who was an ardent defender of the farming interests of Solano County. Through the efforts of men like Congressman Buck, the county received some relief in the form of federal aid to the indigent and the unemployed, through Works Progress Administration projects, which provided sidewalk and street construction in some towns, and through the Civilian Conservation Corps, which established Camp Chester in the English Hills, the only CCC camp in Solano County. Camp Chester youth transplanted over 100,000 trees for erosion control and seeded over 125,000 square yards of gully channels with permanent ground cover.

Government employment for the



The world famous Nut Tree Restaurant had its humble beginning as a wayside stand east of Vacaville. Courtesy, Nut Tree Restaurant (From a painting by Merv Corning)

young may have provided some relief, but the situation for experienced workers was grim and difficult, especially among farm laborers. These were the years of labor unrest. Solano County had never been completely free of tension among its laboring classes, for the antipathy to the Chinese had been heightened when an earlier depression, in 1893-1894, had resulted in widespread loss of farm jobs. And in the first decade of the twentieth century, the dominant Japanese influence in places like Vacaville was resented, and efforts were made to bring in new immigrant groups like the Spaniards from Andalusia.

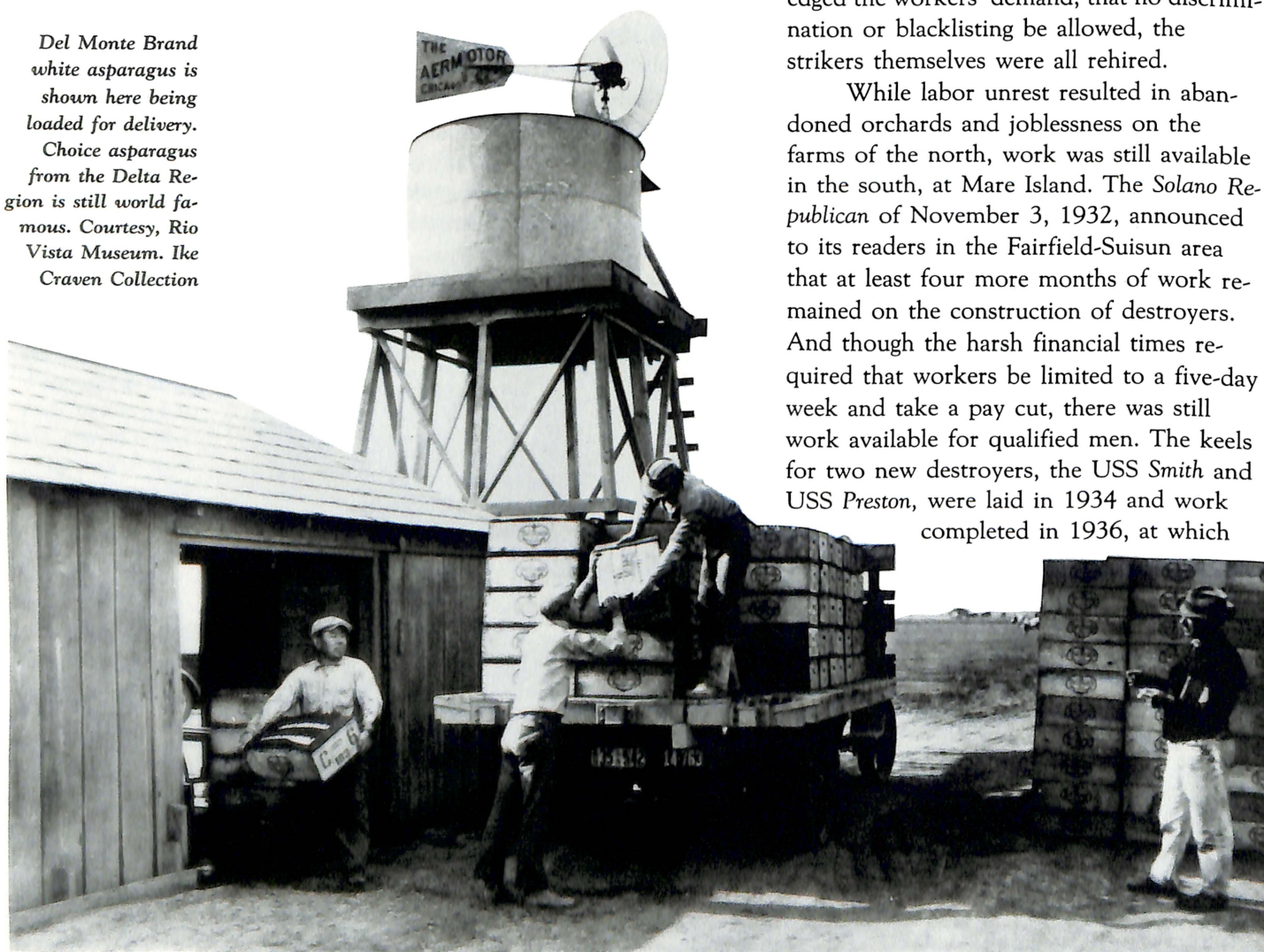
Indeed, it was these very Spanish labor-

ers who organized in the early 1930s to form farm unions that were influenced by Communist labor organizers. They were especially successful in Vacaville, where the best pruners were Spanish, about 300 of them, who controlled this critical phase of fruit production. When the pruners went out on strike in 1932 against large growers like Frank Buck, Ed Uhl, and Clement Hartley, both sides viewed it as a test of strength about the future of farm labor unionism. The full story of the Vacaville pruners' strike of 1932 cannot be told here, but, after hunger marches, protests, violence, and vigilantism, the strike ended in January 1933. Although the growers never acknowledged the workers' demand, that no discrimination or blacklisting be allowed, the strikers themselves were all rehired.

While labor unrest resulted in abandoned orchards and joblessness on the farms of the north, work was still available in the south, at Mare Island. The *Solano Republican* of November 3, 1932, announced to its readers in the Fairfield-Suisun area that at least four more months of work remained on the construction of destroyers. And though the harsh financial times required that workers be limited to a five-day week and take a pay cut, there was still work available for qualified men. The keels for two new destroyers, the USS *Smith* and USS *Preston*, were laid in 1934 and work completed in 1936, at which

Del Monte Brand white asparagus is shown here being loaded for delivery.

Choice asparagus from the Delta Region is still world famous. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum. Ike Craven Collection



time the Yard was building the destroyer USS *Hendley* and the submarine *Pompano*. The WPA helped to provide federal funds for various Yard improvements—new plants, hospital extensions, and a new radio station. It was estimated that by 1938, 2,000 men were paid through WPA funds, in addition to the almost 4,000 employed under regular naval contracts.

In the late 1930s when the marks of the Depression were still evident for all to see, there were, nonetheless, clear signs on both the naval and civilian fronts that Solano County might be on the brink of new possibilities. In 1938 Mare Island won a 10-year contract to build one submarine every year and one submarine tender every other year. By 1940 the Yard had 14,000 employees. And on November 12, 1936, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge was opened, fulfilling the 1869 prophecy of San Francisco's pleasant lunatic, Emperor Joshua Norton, that a bridge would one day link San Francisco with the northern counties by way of Yerba Buena Island. The Bay Bridge was an immense project taking three years to complete at a cost of \$77 million. It was, in fact, two bridges, a suspension bridge from San Francisco to Yerba Buena and a cantilever construction between the island and Oakland, the entire length spanning 8.4 miles. Two decks separated westbound and eastbound motorists, allowing one-way travel on each deck. The Bay Bridge, built in the middle of the Great Depression, would transform transportation across San Francisco Bay, allowing even readier access to Solano County with its own growing number of bridges.

As the decade of the 1930s ended, the stage was set for new developments in Solano County, though no one could have suspected or predicted how large and permanent they would become. With an expanding highway system linking the interior of the county with its perimeter, with bridges and causeways connecting the county with its neighbors, and with its strategic location



fronting San Francisco Bay, Solano County would never again be compared to an island. If the rhythms of county life had previously been determined by the coming and going of immigrants and travelers, by the rise and fall of the harvest seasons, by the ebb and flow of the entrepreneurial spirit of its businessmen and orchardists, the coming decades would make clear that Solano's growth and prosperity would respond also to the cycles of war and peace.

Vacaville was famous across the nation and beyond for the quality of its fruits. This page from the Vacaville Reporter from about 1906 reflects how the people felt about their fruit industry. Courtesy, Vacaville Reporter



*Marine World Africa
USA, in Vallejo, is
one of Solano
County's newest attrac-
tions. Its various
shows and exhibits
are sponsored by corpo-
rations who have a
stake in Solano's fu-
ture. Courtesy, Ma-
rine World Africa
USA. Photo by Rob-
ert Allen*

VIII THE CROSSROADS BECOMES JOURNEY'S END

Much of the strength and attraction of Solano County comes from its diversity, first endowed by a bountiful nature, then improved by the hand of man. There is no dominant city or region, no single farm crop, no particular business or industry that serves as the barometer of the county's wealth and prosperity. The towns and cities are quite different from one another, just as the agricultural products span a rich spectrum of fruits, vegetables and grains; the modes of transporta-

tion include water, land, and rail, while commerce and industry are based on both government and private resources. This grand variety and rich blend of interests has enabled the county as a whole to prosper even when one or another segment of the economy is in decline.

A case in point is the Mare Island Naval Yard. Though it has been the industrial anchor of southern Solano County since 1852, the coming of World War II would see a growth and development both powerful and permanent—especially for the City of Vallejo.

From about 6,000 workers in 1939, the Naval Yard grew to 40,000 workers in 1944 while the population of Vallejo, in these same years, increased from 30,000 to 100,000 people. Housing projects sprang up like mushrooms, with names like Federal Terrace and Roosevelt Terrace. One, Chabot Terrace, was a 3,000-unit project, which, when completed, had 10,000 residents and, as one writer noted, became a town the size of Laramie, Wyoming. By the end of the war, on V-J Day in 1945, nine Vallejo housing projects had a combined population of 30,000 persons, which was Vallejo's entire population six years earlier.

Not all Yard workers lived in Vallejo; some commuted from distant places like San Jose, 75 miles south, or Healdsburg, 70 miles north. Wartime transportation was a major problem; both gas and tire rationing curtailed auto travel. The problem was solved by Greyhound Bus Lines, which contracted to operate the Mare Island bus system. Early in 1942 a 300-bus fleet rolled out three times daily over 22 routes, which averaged 800,000 miles a month. Workers were shuttled to Mare Island from towns and cities within 65 miles of Vallejo—Petaluma, Calistoga, Santa Rosa, Woodland, Sacramento, Antioch, Walnut



After World War II, surplus ships were anchored in the Carquinez Strait just north of Benicia. Here they were processed for storage and maintained for sale or emergency use. Courtesy, Robert Allen Photography

Creek, Oakland, Berkeley, San Leandro, Hayward, Richmond, Fairfax, Mill Valley, and San Francisco.

And the wartime record of construction was impressive. During World War II, Mare Island turned out 17 submarines, four submarine tenders, 31 destroyer escorts, 33 small craft and over 300 landing craft, in addition to major repair jobs on scores and scores of battle-damaged vessels.

One of Mare Island's most famous vessels, the USS *California*, the first superdreadnought built on the Pacific Coast, would also return to the Yard for extensive repairs after taking a cruel battering at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941. Though built in 1919, she was fully repaired and reentered the conflict, engaging in the Battle of Surigao Strait, south of the Island of Leyte in the Philippines, which resulted in the sinking of the huge Japanese battleship *Yamashiro* in 1944. After the war the old battlewagon was mothballed in Philadelphia, but not before her 350-pound bell was removed and shipped back to California, where it proudly hangs on the grounds of the newly-restored State Capitol Building in Sacramento.

With the end of World War II, the

Mare Island Naval Yard returned to a more normal routine, but even today it numbers almost 10,000 civilian workers. It is a powerful economic and social force in Solano County, where most of its workers live. With an annual payroll of \$370 million it is the largest civilian employer in the four North Bay counties.

The fortunes of war also accelerated the growth and development of Vallejo's neighbor, Benicia. The little city near Southampton Bay facing Carquinez Strait has a rich history as a former state capital and never lost prominence because it was also the site of the Army Arsenal and Barracks. In the 1850s and 1860s Benicia was the base for military missions that included guarding wagon trains, surveying rail lines, and attacking hostile Indians as far north as Oregon. It remained active, depending on the cycles of war and peace, for many decades and well into the twentieth century.

By the year 1940, the Benicia Arsenal had begun preparations for the Pacific war that appeared imminent. A deepwater concrete wharf capable of docking four Liberty ships was built at a cost of \$3,416,000, and over 100 igloo-shaped ammunition bunkers were installed below ground. The

civilian work force grew from a mere 85 in 1939 to 4,535 by 1942— about half of whom were women. In addition, hundreds of captured Italians and Germans were assigned to work at the Benicia Arsenal.

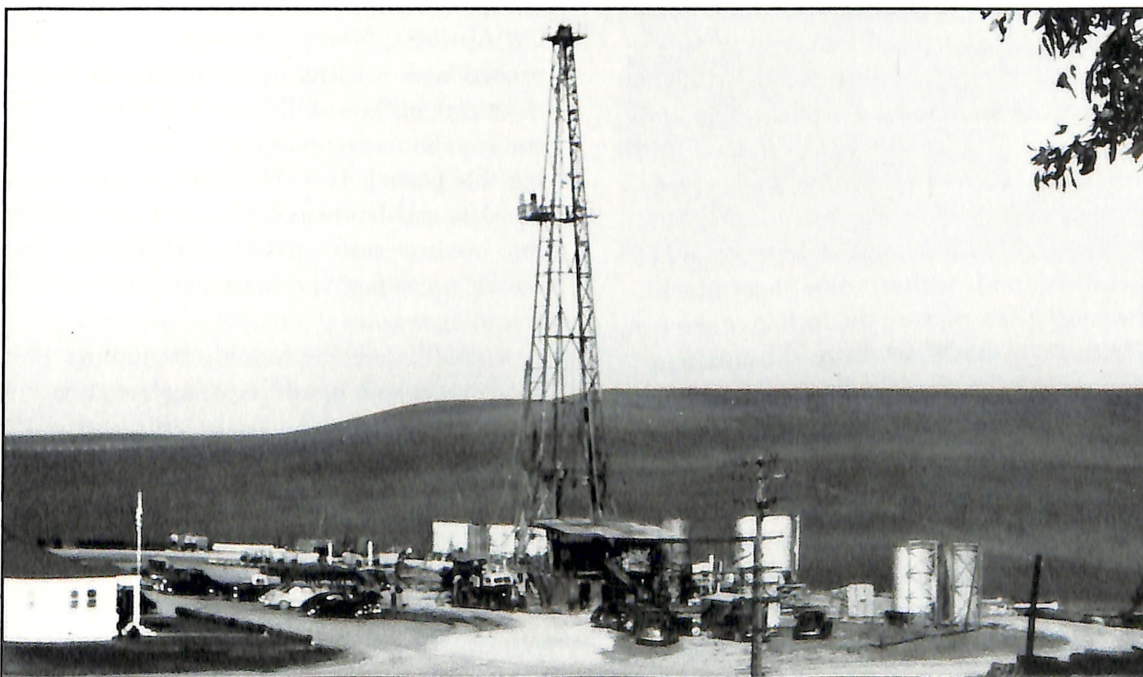
The Arsenal was stocked and restocked with all kinds of weapons and ammunition, from rifles and machine guns to powerful aerial bombs. The bombs were dispatched by truck convoys and loaded in slings aboard Liberty ships for remote Pacific Islands to be placed aboard bombers and fighter planes. The bombs for Jimmy Doolittle's daring raid on Tokyo on April 18, 1942, were sent from the Benicia Arsenal.

After the war, the number of workers fell to about 1,400 in 1947, then rose to 2,400 when, once again, preparations for war began. When the Korean War broke out in 1950, warehouse space was so limited that almost 150,000 tons of supplies were stacked up outside in the open air. By the middle of 1951, there were 6,700 workers at the Arsenal.

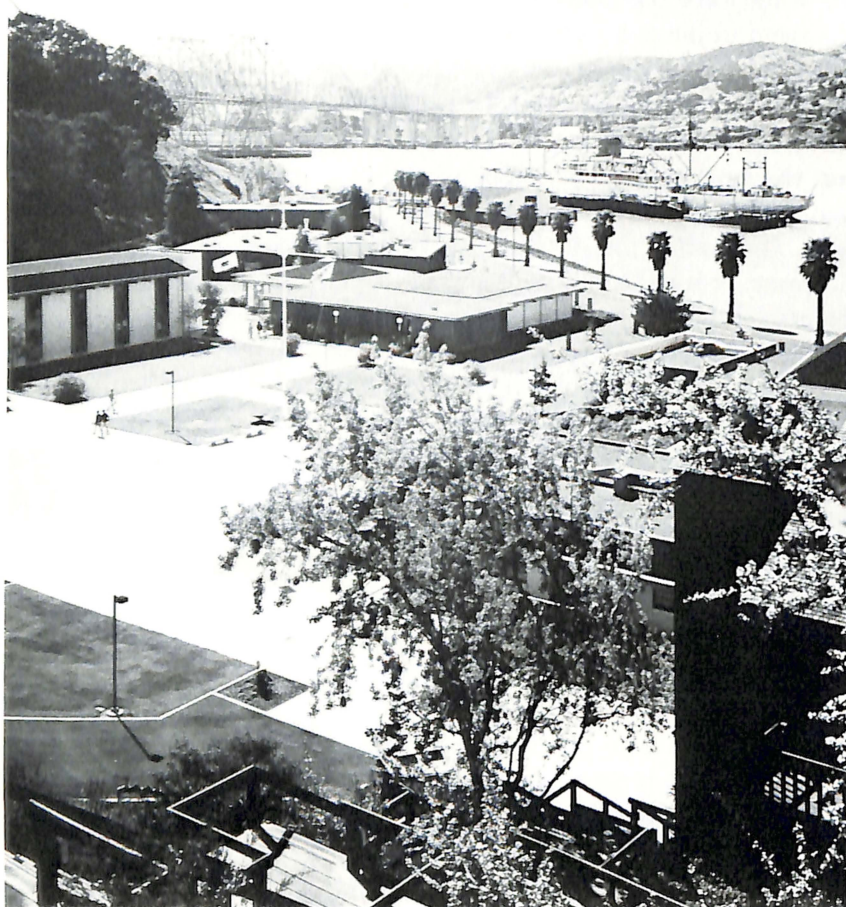
When the Korean War ended in 1953, activities were greatly reduced, and

the work force was decreased to only a few thousand in the late 1950s. On March 30, 1964, the Army closed the Arsenal, and, though the townspeople and the politicians made every effort to restore it to active status, the long and proud history of the Benicia Arsenal and Barracks was over.

The end of the installation did not, however, mean the end of Benicia's development, because the land was purchased by the enterprising city and leased to Benicia Industries as part of a new Industrial Park. Today that park contains 3,000 acres and is the largest port-oriented complex in northern California. It holds more than 300 manufacturers, distributors, shippers, and financial service centers, the largest of which is the Exxon Refinery, whose \$216 million facility was built on 400 acres in 1966-1969. It was Exxon that received the first shipload of crude oil from the Alaska Pipeline at Valdez, Alaska, and its huge supertankers, the size of a football field, now dock regularly at Benicia. Benicia's wharf is a major West Coast center for imported cars; each year 130,000 automobiles roll through an auto



This well was drilled on the Arthur Emigh Ranch by the Amerada Petroleum Company in 1936 to a depth of 4,000 feet. It was this well which discovered the great natural gas field at Rio Vista. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum



The California Maritime Academy is located in Benicia. Beyond the line of palm trees rides the training ship Golden Bear. The Golden Bear serves as a training ship and floating laboratory for young men and women destined to become U.S. Merchant Marine officers or engineering specialists. Courtesy, California Maritime Academy

import facility located there.

The city has been especially sensitive to its historical and architectural treasures, and the old state capitol building has been completely refurbished and decorated in the period of 1853 when Benicia was indeed the capitol of California. Many other sites of homes, churches, and colleges have been identified, and, within a few short blocks, the tourist can capture the feeling of the frontier days in the West. Even the commandant's house of the old Benicia Arsenal has been turned into a charming restaurant.

The California Maritime Academy, established in 1929, is somewhat hidden, but the persistent visitor will find, along the north shore of the strait near the city of Vallejo, a lively waterfront campus, hundreds of maritime students, and the training ship *Golden Bear*. The young men and women

are destined to become officers in the U.S. Merchant Marine or in other professional maritime or engineering fields. The California Maritime Academy was established in 1929, and its graduates have served honorably in both peace and war.

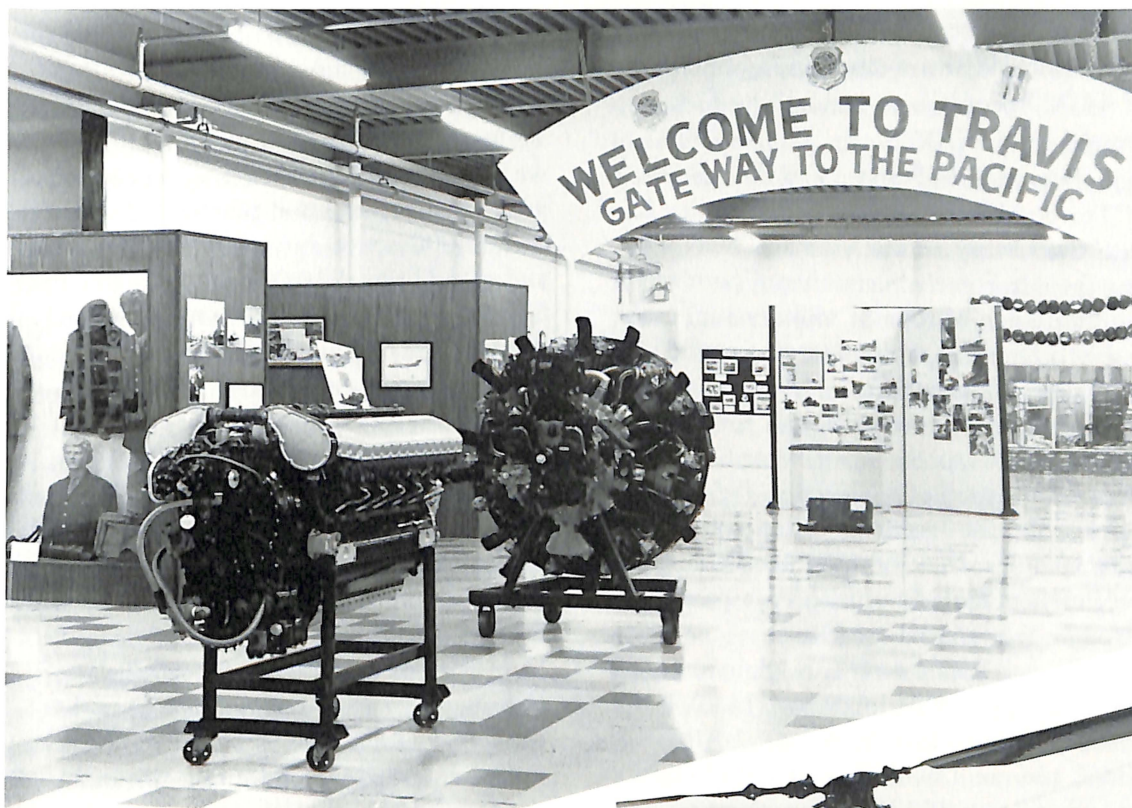
Other towns and cities in Solano County have also played a critical role during troubled military times, notably Rio Vista. As early as 1936 the Amerada Petroleum Company was prospecting for oil on the broad plains outside Rio Vista when it discovered the largest natural dry gas field in California. By 1942, Rio Vista was providing natural gas for the entire Bay Area, and it continued until fairly recent times.

Just as Solano County had earlier accommodated the U.S. Navy near Vallejo and the U.S. Army at Benicia, it would, during World War II, also provide an airfield for the U.S. Air Force near Fairfield and Suisun City.

Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the air defense of the Pacific Coast was a high priority. Seeking land for an airfield, the Fourth Air Force and the U.S. Corps of Engineers recommended a 945-acre site "six miles east of the twin farming communities of Fairfield and Suisun City." On April 22, 1942, the project was approved with a spending authorization of almost one million dollars to build two runways and a few temporary buildings. During this period, U.S. Navy planes practiced takeoffs and landings from the painted outline of an aircraft carrier's deck against the strong prevailing winds similar to those found at sea.

Such were the humble beginnings of the base, which would be transferred in 1943 to the Air Transport Command of the Pacific Wing and named the Fairfield-Suisun Army Air Base. Its first mission was to prepare tactical bombers and crews for South Pacific assignments, and between July 1943 and January 1945 over 2,000 military aircraft of every type were sent overseas.

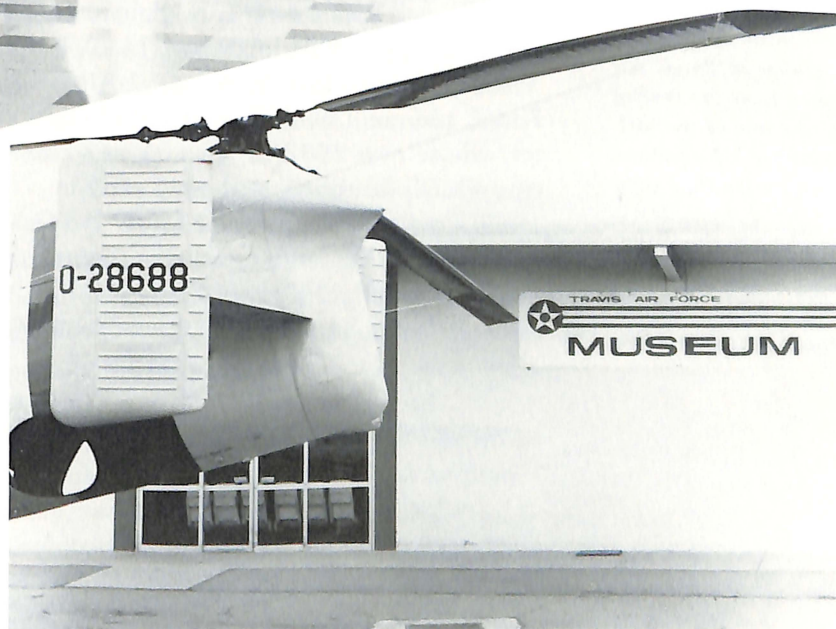
From a handful of army personnel in



Left: This is an interior view of the Travis Air Force Base Museum. Planes are displayed both inside and outside the building. The spacious museum can easily accommodate both large and small visitor groups. Courtesy, Travis Air Force Base, Public Affairs. Photo by Robert Allen

1943, the base grew to over 2,000 enlisted men and 173 officers by the fall of 1944. The first Women's Army Corps (WAC) personnel arrived in August 1943, and within a year 200 WAC officers and enlisted women were on duty. By February 1944, members of Section E, the Pacific Wing's first black unit, began to arrive. In 1947 President Harry S Truman created the United States Air Force as a separate and equal military service, and the base was renamed the Fairfield-Suisun Air Force Base.

That name remained, however, for only a few years. On the night of August 5, 1950, a tragedy occurred that resulted in a second and final name change. On this evening a bomb-laden B-29 with the base commander, Brigadier General Robert F. Travis, aboard as an observer, was taking off to demonstrate a nighttime bombing run when engine malfunctions caused a crash at the end of the runway. Travis and nine crewmen were killed.



The popularity of Robert Travis and his sudden death began a movement to change the base's name. On April 20, 1951, California Governor Earl G. Warren presided at a ceremony dedicating the Robert F. Travis Air Force Base, now known as "Travis AFB."

Another important change occurred in 1966 when the City of Fairfield annexed most of the base's 5,000 acres and all its pop-

Above: The Travis Air Force Base Museum affords a unique look into the history of aviation, displaying aircraft from different eras. Still other displays are housed inside. Courtesy, Travis Air Force Base, Public Affairs.

ulated areas, about 16,000 inhabitants. Suddenly Fairfield was a city with a population of 44,000 people with annual revenues increased by \$250,000.

Between 1965 and 1975 the history of Travis AFB was almost synonymous with the history of the Vietnam War. It was the Air Force's busiest aerial port, ferrying thousands of tons of military supplies and equipment as well as serving as the "jumping off" point for hundreds of thousand of U.S. servicemen bound for Vietnam. Later it was the main West Coast terminal for medical evacuation flights, and, more sadly, the receiving station for military fatalities. In 1968 over 10,000 military caskets from Southeast Asia passed through Travis Air Force Base.

Today Travis AFB is headquarters for the 60th Military Airlift Wing (MAW), the 349th (Reserve) MAW, the 22nd Air Force, and the David Grant Medical Center, whose new 298-bed hospital, at a cost of over \$200 million, will open early in 1989. Travis is also the home for 39 C-5 Galaxies (the world's largest transport carrier, capable of holding 340 troops and 120 tons of cargo), and 34 C-141 Starlifters (one of

the world's largest cargo planes, capable of carrying 70,000 tons).

To accomplish its several missions, Travis AFB is organized like a small town, with shopping areas, churches, schools, playgrounds, and recreation centers. There are almost 8,000 active-duty members at Travis and an additional 10,000 family members. Though about half the military personnel live off base, Travis AFB is actually a bustling little town of well over 10,000 persons.

In addition to its military missions, Travis AFB has served to bring medical supplies to Mexico City during its recent earthquake, ferried the Vatican's "Popemobile" for Pope John Paul II when he visited San Francisco, transported former Philippine President Marcos into exile from Manila to Hawaii, and received Aeroflot planes that brought Russian scientists to inspect U.S. missile installations under the provisions of the INF Treaty.

But perhaps Travis AFB has had its greatest influence on Solano County through the airmen and -women who have served at Travis and then chosen to remain as retirees. It is estimated that tens of thousands of servicemen and -women, formerly assigned to Travis, now reside here. Their experience and stability, their resources and

These C-5A Galaxy military transport planes at Travis Air Force Base are crucial to the role of the Military Air Command and a familiar sight over the skies of Solano County. Courtesy, Travis Air Force Base, Public Affairs. Photo by Robert Allen



community interests, make a continuing contribution to the present and future of Solano County.

If the ordinary tourist driving past Fairfield does not perceive the huge Travis AFB just over the hills, it is equally true that the tourist driving past Vacaville does not see another major Solano institution lying just outside his vision. A large sign off Highway 80 reads "Correctional Medical Facility," yet most do not realize that, just a short distance away, is what has been called "the largest prison in the free world." It is the California Medical Facility located on 800 acres just southeast of Vacaville, which holds a prison population of over 7,000 inmates.

Solano County has progressed in many ways over the years, but perhaps nowhere so much as in the improvement of its prisons. In the *Solano Republican* of February 23, 1906, the headline read: "Unenviable Distinction of Solano County: Has Worst Jail in the State." The head of California's penal institutions of that day would be surprised to see Solano's prisons today. The California Medical Facility (CMF) was established by law as a psychiatric and diagnostic clinic for every inmate in California's prisons. The Penal Code mandates "... a scientific study of each prisoner, his career and life history, the cause of his criminal acts, and recommendations for his care, training and employment with a view to his reformation and to the protection of society."

After its establishment in 1955, CMF expanded to include also the permanent incarceration of inmates. At its northern or main facility, a reception center plus prison facilities accommodate an average of 3,000 inmates, about 500 of whom receive diagnostic, medical, and psychiatric tests prior to assignment to another California prison.

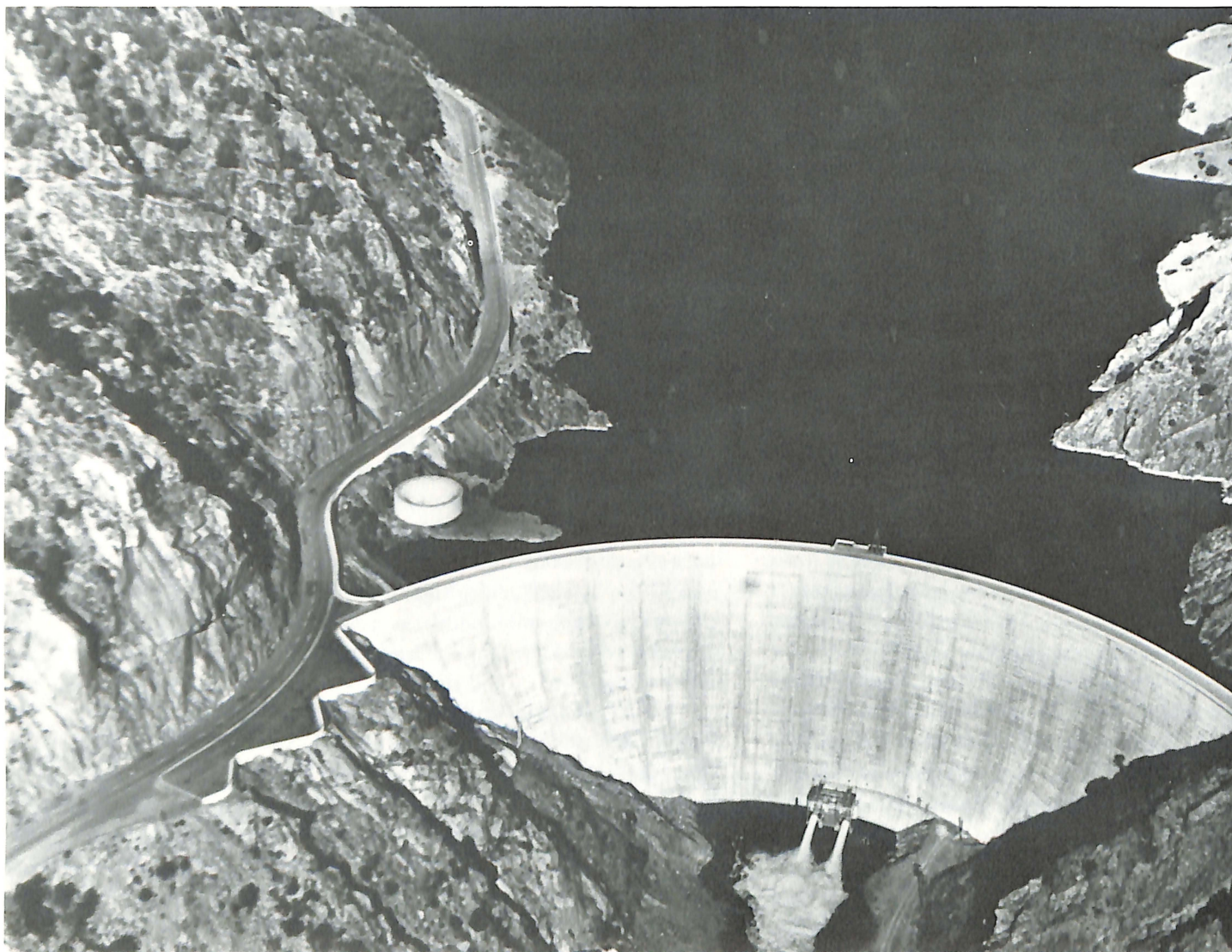
A short distance away, a new prison was completed in 1986 to house 4,000 inmates. Of modular construction, each of the four facilities has six housing units that hold at least 100 men; the units face an

open yard and are within easy access of offices for the school and work programs required of all inmates. A variety of skills, including reading, computer programming, bookbinding, lens grinding, auto mechanics, and vehicle refurbishing, are taught.

The CMF may not be well-known to the general population, but its presence is a powerful economic force in the community. The prison population of 7,000 men is supervised by correction officers and support and medical service personnel, totaling 2,300 persons. The expenditure per inmate is \$18,000 per year, while the facility's annual budget is \$145 million; the payroll budget alone is over \$100 million. As California's prison population grows, CMF will become an even more important part of a network of prisons throughout the state, which, as a by-product, results in both an improved economic climate in the county and a source of employment for many of Solano's citizens.

While huge institutions like CMF and Travis AFB were being created, and while the cities and towns of Solano County were being developed during and after the years of World War II, the less populated areas, especially the farming communities, were making their contribution through crop production. By the 1930s and 1940s, however, the water table had declined substantially, and there were serious irrigation problems. For many decades, the farmers of Solano County had looked north for water, to Putah Creek and to the Devil's Gate, the gorge that opens into the Berryessa Valley at a juncture where the counties of Solano, Napa and Yolo converge. But it was not until 1948 that the Solano Irrigation District (SID) was formed to work with the U.S. Department of Reclamation to fully develop the water resources of Putah Creek.

By the early 1950s a plan had emerged whereby a dam would be constructed at Devil's Gate, and the little town of Monticello in the Berryessa valley would



The Monticello Dam, completed in 1957 by the United States Bureau of Reclamation, is located on Putah Creek at the junction of the Solano, Napa and Yolo counties. The dam is 270 feet high, 1,017 feet long, and backs up 1,600,000 acre-feet of water. Courtesy, Solano Irrigation District

be inundated. The 20,700 acres of the valley became Lake Berryessa, a tri-county recreational playground with 165 miles of shoreline. Construction began on the Monticello Dam on September 25, 1953, and the 300-foot dam, costing \$20 million of federal money, was completed four years later.

Almost immediately construction began on another dam six miles downstream that would create Lake Solano. It was called the Putah Diversion Dam, and it channeled water through the 33-mile Putah South Canal running through Solano County all the way to Green Valley. By 1960 all construction was completed, but as early as 1959 the first irriga-

tion water was moving along the foothills by gravity flow into Solano County; it had an immediate and beneficial effect on agricultural production.

The vision of those who planned and developed SID goes far beyond the needs of agriculture. Today it is indispensable for the water needs of the many new communities and commercial centers springing up in Solano County, especially in the Vaca Valley and, more recently, in the Fairfield-Suisun area. The SID remains a marvel of local planning, for it remains independent, functioning outside of the major California water systems, either the Center Valley Proj-

ect or the State Water Project.

Nevertheless, the northern portion of the county, where Solano's water resources lie, is the least developed—and many citizens like it that way. The town of Dixon, for example, has been particularly successful in limiting growth while maintaining a quality of life appropriate for a small rural community of 10,000 people. Though growth is allowed, the town discourages high density housing projects and large urban developments—as several ambitious entrepreneurs and developers have discovered.

Solano County has found other ways to manage urban growth while preserving the natural environment and putting it to new and productive uses. One such use came about through the generosity of the daughter of Solano pioneer John R. Wolfskill, Mrs. Francis Wolfskill Taylor Wilson, who in 1937 bequeathed over 100 acres to the University of California at Davis for an experimental farm, a gift that enshrined the

remarkable agricultural contributions of the Wolfskill brothers in Solano's early history. More recently, in 1988, a 2,000-acre tidal area in the Suisun Marsh basin was purchased by the Solano County Farmlands and Open Space Foundation as a permanent preserve. The state-managed 14,000-acre Grizzly Island Wildlife Area near Suisun is now open to tourists interested in maintaining and improving wildlife, including the great tule elk, white pelicans, and hundreds of bird and fish species.

If Solano's geography is diverse and its cities and towns distinct in character, the county is, nonetheless, united in its concern for a common history and formal education. The county's newspapers have always taken a special interest in the history of their region, and on particular anniversaries have presented memorable accounts of times past. In 1955 the Solano County Historical Society was founded, and in 1958 began the publication of its remarkable



The extent of Solano County's building boom is reflected in the tract housing and industrial facilities visible in this picture. Courtesy, Robert Allen Photography

Notebook, containing fascinating glimpses into Solano's rich historical heritage. The *Notebook* is now supplemented by the semi-annual *Solano Historian* which began publication by the Society in 1985.

Indeed, Solano's heritage is so rich that various towns and cities—notably Benicia, Vallejo, Vacaville, and Rio Vista—have established their own museums with regular exhibits and special staffs. And no community in Solano is without an enthusiastic band of local historians. In order to establish a common ground on which the various groups can share their interest, the History Round Table was formed. Through its initiative, the Solano County Board of Supervisors on September 22, 1987, voted to appoint a Solano County Records Commission whose purpose is to discover, inventory, and preserve the county's recorded history.

As in the case of history, Solano's citizens have shown a persistent and genuine interest in higher education. In the nineteenth century, towns like Benicia and Vacaville were the centers of private higher education, while in the twentieth century, it is the Suisun Valley which is home for Solano Community College, the center of public higher education.

In 1955 the citizens of Solano County overwhelmingly voted to establish a community college district, though the community college itself had existed within the Vallejo School District since 1945. Once again, in 1967, the voters acted and approved a \$12.5-million bond issue and construction began on a new campus. In 1971 the Solano Community College opened on a beautiful location near the foothills in the Suisun Valley just off Highway 80 near Rockville. Today the spacious and attractive campus enrolls almost 10,000 full- and part-time students, and its able faculty and administration draw

students from every corner of the county either to pursue vocational careers in two-year programs or to complete their degrees and transfer to a four-year college.

With its history secure and its horizons unlimited, Solano County has more than fulfilled its mission as "The Crossroads County." Since 1850, when California entered the Union, the county has gradually increased its accessibility to visitors by widening its roads and extending them, by erecting bridges, and by building towns and cities that, in their rich diversity and urban style, have drawn thousands of citizens to share their future. As drivers speed along Highway 80—that giant commercial corridor that once was ancient Patwin land—they see the promise of a richer and better life, a region so situated by geography and so blessed by nature that the visitor is impelled to stay awhile, just as the early pioneers foresaw.

The visions of Vallejo and Vaca, of Semple, Frisbie, and Waterman, have all been realized in recent years. Solano's attraction has proven irresistible. Between 1960 and 1980 the number of people living here has increased 75 percent. In 1985, Solano County led all other Bay Area counties both in growth and in household size, with a population of almost 275,000 people. By the year 2000 it is estimated that over 400,000 people will reside in Solano County.

It was Solano's destiny to be "The Crossroads County," but the roads now are longer, wider, deeper. There are now many roads and many visitors waiting to cross them. Like the miners of an earlier day, travelers have discovered in Solano something more valuable than gold: a home that grows more precious year by year. Solano County today is not merely a cross-road. It is now the end of the journey.

Facing page: This red barn in Rio Vista complements beautifully the vast fields of grain that encompass it. Grain has been a staple crop on area ranches since the early 1860s. Photo by Robert Allen

Right: The seal of Solano County reflects the major commercial and historical aspects of Solano County. As most of Solano County is ringed by water, the seal is ringed by a life preserver. Courtesy, County of Solano





Right: The "Greek temple" that was the old Benicia capitol building still stands today and is listed in California as a historical landmark. Photo by Dana Downie

Opposite page, top left: This is the east-upper bedroom of the Fischer-Hanlon House. The commode held the "thundermug," or chamber pot. The wash basin and water pitcher rest on its marble top.

Photo by Robert Allen. Courtesy, Benicia Capitol State Historic Park





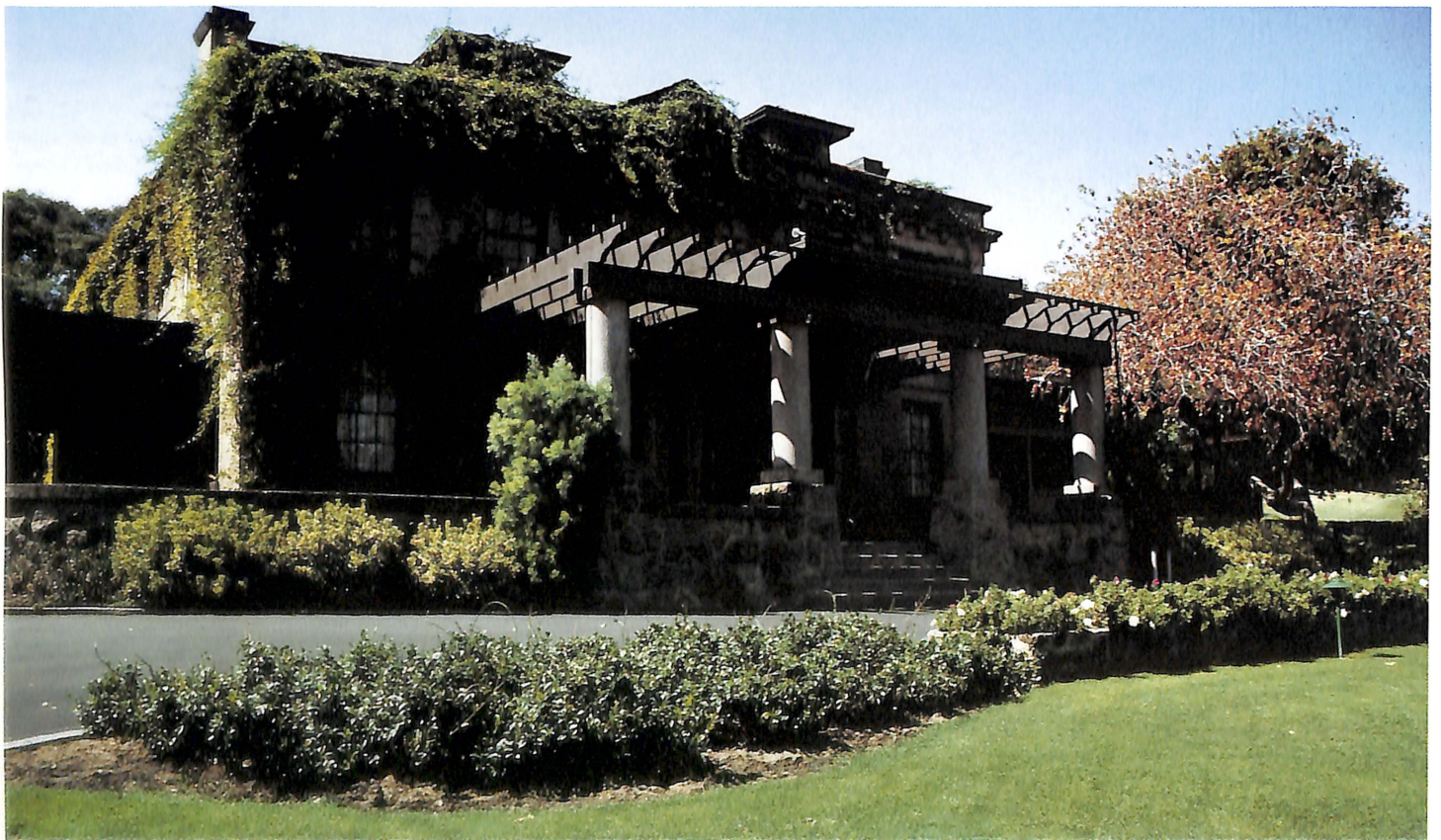
Above: This is the dining room of the Fischer-Hanlon House. Note the fine china and the quality of the furniture. Photo by Robert Allen. Courtesy, Benicia Capitol State Historic Park

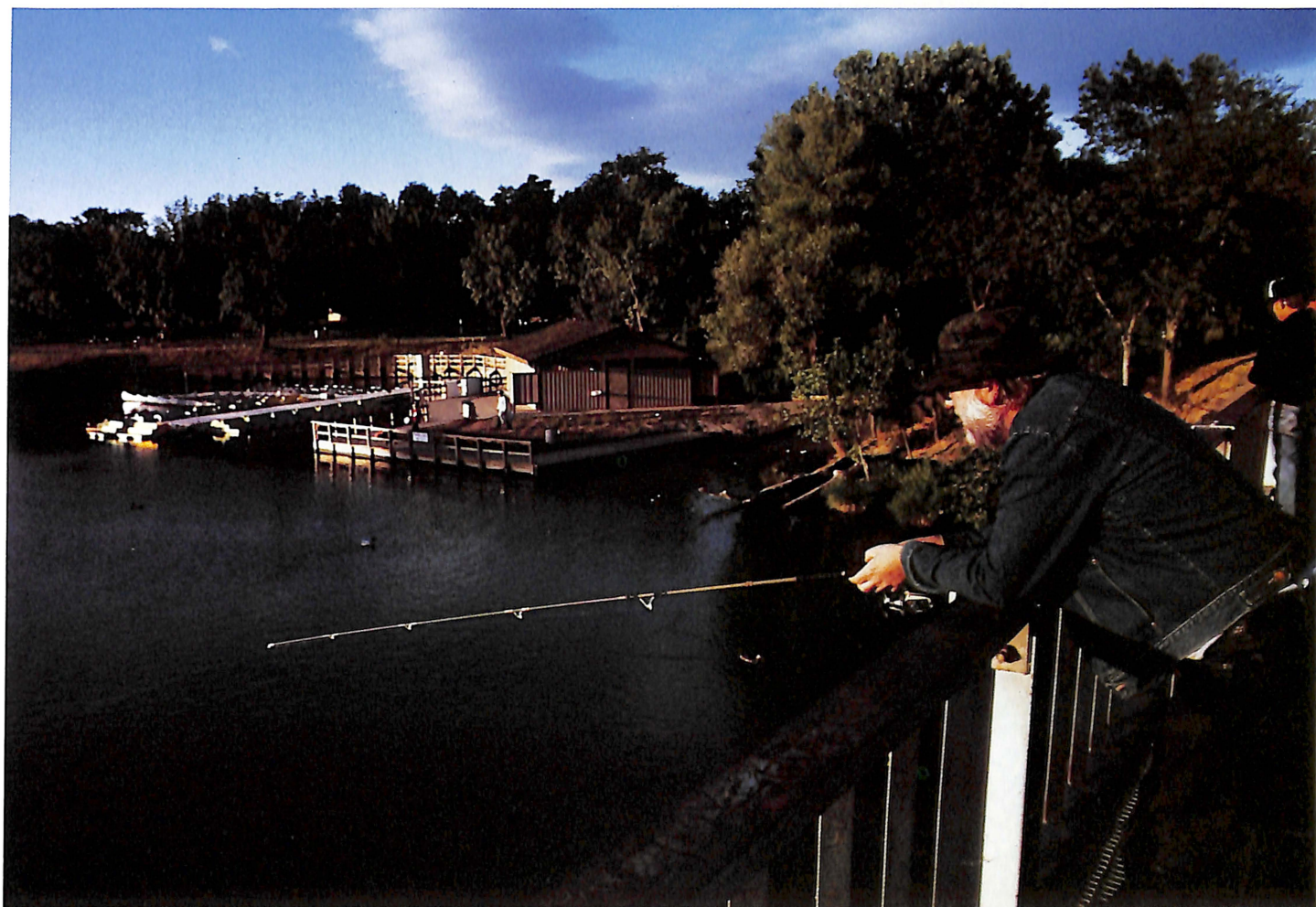
Left: The beautifully restored and maintained Fischer-Hanlon House in Benicia is replete with furniture and sorted vestiges of the nineteenth century for those hungry for a taste of pioneer life. Photo by Dana Downie

Right: The California
Railway Museum in
Rio Vista is dedicated
to preserving the
many fine trains and
streetcars that oper-
ated throughout the
county and the state.
Photo by Mark E.
Gibson



Below: Built by Gran-
ville Perry Swift, this
handsome structure is
now home to the
Green Valley Country
Club. Photo by Mark
E. Gibson





With the creation of the Putah Diversion Dam came Lake Solano and a variety of new recreational activities including fishing and boating. Photo by Dana Downie

Right: Be it schooners, tankers, or forgotten "Liberty Ships", there will always be a place for ships of sea in the waters around Solano County. These sailboats were photographed in Vallejo.

Photo by Dana Downie

Below: The annual All Nations Festival salutes the ethnic diversity that has enriched Solano County over the past 100 years.

Photo by Norman Prince

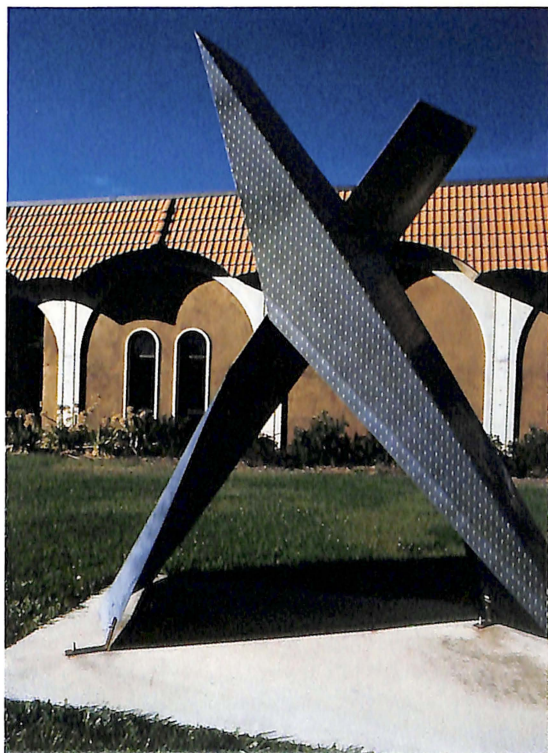
Opposite page, bottom: This contemporary sculpture adorns the grounds surrounding the Fine Arts building at the Solano Community College.

Photo by Norman Prince

Opposite page, far right: Come air show time visitors to Travis Air Force Base have the opportunity to tour military aircraft and to enjoy exciting flight demonstrations.

Photo by Mark E. Gibson







The meat market and home of Edward Krause is seen here at Bird's Landing sometime before 1800. Butcher wagons delivered meat on order to ranches throughout Solano County. These wagons served the Collinsville and Montezuma Hills area. Courtesy, Rio Vista Museum

IX

PARTNERS IN PROGRESS

With its location between San Francisco and Sacramento, Solano County has been perceived by many Northern Californians as a rural way station between the two metropolitan centers. Today that perception of pleasant communities in surroundings still relatively pastoral works to the county's advantage in attracting new businesses to the area.

Long a center for agriculture, Solano County began to boom in the years following World War II. The establishment of Travis Air Force Base began a spiral of growth and development that doubled the county's population in less than a decade. This growth continues today.

Much of Solano County's history is told in the story of its businesses. As the population grew, so did existing businesses. A wider variety of services was demanded, prompting the arrival of new firms, which in turn required new buildings, new workers, and further new services.

The organizations that have chosen to participate in this history project date from every period in Solano County's history, from the early days of western settlement, through the postwar baby boom years, to

the past decade. They include government agencies, community organizations, and private corporations both large and small.

Of particular note are those concerns that contribute directly to the development of the county: two building contractors, a title company, a power company, and two organizations primarily involved in promoting development. Providing the financial support and services necessary to area growth are a commercial bank, a public accounting firm, and a credit bureau.

Growing communities demand quality public services; represented are an educational agency, two hospitals, a medical group, two newspapers, and a radio station.

Other firms provide products for sale; two manufacturing concerns are recent arrivals in Solano County, while an agricultural producer can trace its history back to before the turn of the century.

Common to all of these organizations is an awareness of their membership in a community and a sense of responsibility, along with private citizens and government officials, for the quality of life in Solano County. In addition to providing products and services, nearly all are active in supporting local civic activities and charities. Most are members of local, regional, and national trade and professional associations.

While the stories of these enterprises and organizations do not provide a comprehensive business history of Solano County, they do illustrate much of that history. They provide a range of examples of how businesses survive and grow in a developing community. We hope that these participants in the area's history give readers a taste of what living and working in Solano County has been and remains today.

FAIRFIELD-SUISUN CHAMBER OF COMMERCE



The members of the Fairfield Lions Club exhibited considerable foresight in 1946 when they founded the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce. From a combined population of barely 5,000 in 1950, the cities of Suisun and Fairfield have today grown to nearly 90,000, giving the chamber plenty of opportunity to pursue its stated mission: to advance economic development, promote commerce and business, and enhance the area's social and cultural environment.

The Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce has been an active participant in the striking growth of Solano County, both in assisting existing businesses and in helping to bring new firms to the area. The chamber provides publicity for new members in local newspapers and in chamber publications, and holds regular business mixers for members to get acquainted. Other services for local firms include the provision of a group insurance plan for small businesses and, in cooperation with the City of Fairfield and the University of California at Davis, a fitness program. An economic development committee works cooperatively with other agencies to improve the local business climate, advertise the area, and publish information useful to new businesses and industries.

Suisun Plaza just after a snowstorm in the early 1900s. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council

Like the California State Chamber of Commerce, of which it is a member, the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce does much of its work through committees. The legislative committee studies and offers advice on federal, state, and local issues, and conducts candidates' nights prior to elections. The transportation committee studies and recommends chamber policy on such issues as upgrading interchanges on Interstate 80 and improving traffic flow and mobility. It aims to help the community achieve a balanced transportation system.

Of special note is the military affairs committee, whose role is to work on events and programs de-

signed to maintain and improve relations with Travis Air Force Base personnel. Among its activities is the sponsorship of an awards program for airman, noncommissioned officer, senior noncommissioned officer, and company grade officer of the quarter and of the year. The quarterly awards are presented in rotation by the several local service clubs, while the yearly awards are made at a banquet held annually at Travis.

Public service is an important aspect of the chamber's activities. Through the Assist-A-Grad program, chamber members raise funds, administer the selection process, and conduct an awards ceremony for a scholarship program for local high school graduates. The Women's Division sponsors the annual new teachers' reception, the popular Fourth of July parade, and provides material and volunteer support for all activities. The Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce sponsors a leadership program for the community, and conducts such popular events as the Fourth of July Fireworks, the Halloween Parade, and a golf tournament. Other useful projects include the publication of a map of the Fairfield-Suisun area, a membership directory, and a guide to local clubs and organizations.

Fairfield around the turn of the century looking east along Texas Street. Courtesy, Vacaville Heritage Council



TICOR TITLE INSURANCE

Ticor Title Insurance of Solano County, with offices in Fairfield, Vallejo, and Vacaville, is not only the largest but also the oldest title company in Solano County. The operation started out on Union Avenue in Fairfield as Solano County Abstract Company in 1908, and moved to 740 Texas Street in 1926. Later that year the firm became Solano County Title Company. In 1954 Solano County Title Company moved to 701 Texas Street, into the first tilt-up building constructed in Fairfield. The firm was acquired by Ticor Title Insurance in 1965.

Ticor was formed in 1893 with the merger of two Los Angeles abstract companies. During the next 60 years the organization expanded into other Southern California counties and continued its expansion throughout the United States after World War II. Ticor Title operates nationwide through its 300 company-owned offices, such as the Solano County locations, and through the offices of more than 1,000 agents and approved attorneys.

The quick and orderly transfer of real property almost anywhere in the United States and its territories

Ticor Title Insurance opened its new Solano County headquarters in Fairfield in November 1987.



Solano County Title Company, founded in 1908, occupied what is now the Fairfield Professional Building at 740 Texas Street from 1926 to 1954.

is made possible by the numerous locations and by the firm's computerized system for escrow closings, preparation of title reports and policies, and document generation. The TISTAR system enables employees to process escrow closings quickly and accurately, and to produce title reports and policies with the system's word-processing and specialized software.

Although part of a large corporation, Ticor Title of Solano County is still very much a part of the local community. Several employees have been hired, trained, and expect to continue locally with the company, and

the Solano offices are noted for their long-term employees. Ticor's management staff is comprised of six individuals, all of whom started their careers with Ticor locally, and have service tenures ranging from 13 to 25 years.

Ticor is very supportive of community activities and organizations such as the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce and the Solano Economic Development Corporation (SEDCORP). The firm is active in each community service group in Fairfield. Ticor's philosophy is that "We're a people business, so we need to be out in the community and involved in it." Ticor Title is also an active supporter of the United Way.

Ticor Title Insurance has a bright future in Solano County. The availability of land, the existence of quality developments and local attractions, and the progressive attitude of local government combine to make the area attractive to new businesses and new residents alike.

SOLANO COUNTY OFFICE OF EDUCATION

Solano County's first public school was established in 1852 in Benicia, under the charge of Sylvester Woodbridge, Jr. In 1855 James W. Anderson, county superintendent of Common Schools, reported the existence of nine schools in five districts. Vacaville, Suisun, Vallejo, Benicia, and Green Valley districts reported 641 children, 305 of whom were enrolled in school; average daily attendance was 217. The school year was anywhere from three to nine months, and teacher salaries ranged from \$50 to \$150 per month.

The Education Act of 1856 provided for an elected county superintendent, whose duties included making reports, examining teachers, inspecting schools, and distributing education funds. Sylvester Woodbridge, Jr., was chosen as Solano County's first elected superintendent. Since 1900 there have been six superintendents: Dan H. White, Tennant C. McDaniel, Fred G. McCombs, Clarence Golomb, James W. Chadbourne, and Wendall L. Kuykendall, incumbent.

The office of Wendall L. Kuykendall, Ed.D., superintendent, is located at 655 Washington Street, Fairfield.

In 1879 the California Constitution established a four-member board of education in each county. In the early 1950s the legislature provided for elected board members. Today the Solano County Board of Education consists of seven members elected to four-year terms.

Solano County now contains six unified school districts, Benicia, Dixon, Fairfield-Suisun, Travis, Vacaville, and Vallejo City, and one community college district, Solano Community College. These districts educate more than 63,000 students in 85 schools, with an average daily attendance of 60,000. While most county schools operate on a regular nine-month school year, several schools operate on a year-round, or 45/15 schedule, with 45 days of classes followed by a 15-day break. Teacher salaries range from \$20,260 to \$43,903.

The county office of education serves as an intermediary between the state department of education and the local school districts, providing curriculum and instructional support, legislative updates, and business services. The office also processes applications for teaching credentials, supervises school district elections, and hears appeals of unre-



The Gomer School, built in 1900, is the oldest Solano County school still in use. The facility is now used for alternative education classes.

solved district disputes.

Direct instructional services, including home-to-school transportation, are provided for special education students ranging in age from infancy to 21. Regional Occupation Programs and alternative education services include career preparation and job placement services for high school students and adults, court and day schools for students at juvenile hall and wards of the court, independent study and counseling for dropouts and students "at risk," drug abuse prevention and intervention services, and self-sufficiency skills for teen and adult single parents and public assistance recipients.

With 262 employees, including administrators, teachers, instructional aides, resource specialists, psychologists, school nurses, bus drivers, and custodians, the Solano County Office of Education continues to evolve and adapt its progress to assure that every student has access to a quality education.



FAIRFIELD MEDICAL GROUP

When the Fairfield Medical Group was established in the 1940s, it was the prime source of most of the medical care available in the community. According to Dr. Richard Zimmerman, one of the founding physicians (and the only one still practicing medicine), there were only 11 doctors, all general practitioners, in Solano County when he began his practice.

For the next two decades the Fairfield Medical Group consisted of four to six general practitioners with a support staff of about 30. During this period the group operated a private, 12-bed hospital and considered house calls a normal part of the practice. With the construction of Intercommunity Hospital nearby (now NorthBay Medical Center) and the advent of more stringent state earthquake-proofing standards, the hospital was closed, and the group became strictly an outpatient facility.

In 1978 the Fairfield Medical Group hired Dominic C. Scolaro as

its administrator when it decided to expand into a multispecialty medical group. Under his guidance, the group occupied its new two-story, 40,000-square-foot Medical Arts Center in August 1984. Currently, the group consists of more than 30 physicians representing most medical specialties and subspecialties. Primary care, nursing, technical, and clerical staff number about 110. A satellite office across from VacaValley Hospital in Vacaville expanded its facilities fourfold from 2,000 to 8,000 square feet in July 1988.

An addition of 30,000 square feet to the Fairfield office is planned by 1990. The expansion will accommodate a new cardiopulmonary rehabilitation center, a sports medicine department, and space for patient education classes, as well as provide growing room for existing departments. Within the next five years the group plans to reach its full capacity of 40 physicians with appropriate support staff comprising the two offices.

Fairfield Medical Group provides

Left: Dr. Richard E. Zimmerman, a family practitioner for nearly 40 years, is a founding physician of the Fairfield Medical Group.

Below: The Fairfield Medical Group occupied its new 40,000-square-foot office building in August 1984. The structure received the City of Fairfield Design Award for new office building design for 1984-1985.

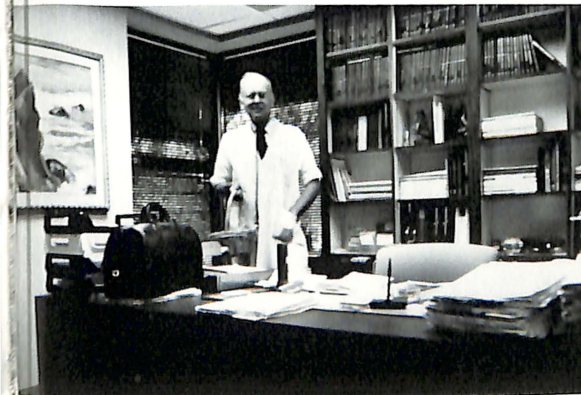


Fairfield Medical Group administrator Dominic C. Scolaro oversaw the group's expansion and new building construction, which began in 1978.

service for more than 65,000 patients and supplies industrially related medical services and pre-employment physicals for 90 area businesses. The group also serves Medicare and Champus patients, and is a provider for both Health Net and IPM Health Plan health maintenance organizations. As a convenience to patients, the group will also directly bill private insurance carriers, such as Blue Shield and Blue Cross, with the group completing all the necessary insurance paperwork for the patients.

Even with its recent rapid growth, the group still places a high value on the personal touch, from central appointments to the attending physician. Barbara Smith, the new-patient coordinator, provides patient orientations, helps with initial registration forms, and gives general assistance. The group's watchword, according to associate administrator Paulette West-Simone, is "How else can we help you?"

That spirit may be best exemplified by Dr. Zimmerman, who still makes house calls!



KAISER PERMANENTE MEDICAL CENTER-VALLEJO

Kaiser Permanente Medical Center-Vallejo and its satellite facilities are part of the nation's largest private health care system that provides comprehensive, prepaid medical and hospital services for nearly 5 million people in 15 states and the District of Columbia. The system traces its beginnings to a series of industrial health care programs for construction, shipyard, and steel mill workers for the Kaiser industrial companies during the late 1930s and World War II. At the war's end in 1945, in response to workers who asked that the program be continued and because participating physicians wanted to continue the prepaid group practice, the program was opened to community enrollment.

Kaiser opened its first medical offices in downtown Vallejo in 1944. At the request of the Tenant Council of the Vallejo Housing Authority, an additional medical office was established at Hillside Dormitories in July 1945. Two years later Kaiser purchased Vallejo Community Hospital and a 30-acre site from the Federal Works Administration. The present full-service hospital was completed in 1973, and two new medical office buildings opened in 1980. The Vallejo Medical Center, along with medical offices in Fairfield and Napa, serves 170,000 members. The hospital, with 130 physicians and a support staff of 1,400, has a licensed bed capacity of 231. Also part of the Vallejo complex is the Kaiser Foundation Rehabilitation Center, which provides specialized physical medicine and rehabilitation services.

The Rehabilitation Center was founded in 1946 in Washington, D.C., as the Kabat-Kaiser Institute, and moved to Vallejo two years later. In 1954 the center was renamed the California Rehabilitation Center and in April 1962 adopted its present name. The center treats conditions that have crippling or phys-

ically handicapping effects, and its services are available to both Kaiser Foundation Health Plan members and nonmembers. The center includes departments in physical therapy, occupational therapy, recreation, social service, speech therapy, and general education. It is renowned as a postgraduate teaching resource for physicians and physical therapists, and provides undergraduate training placement for physical and occupational therapists from approved California schools.

The Napa Medical Offices were opened in 1951 in leased space. A new medical office building opened in 1959, with additions in 1964, 1970, and 1973. An additional new medical office building is scheduled to open in 1990. The Napa facility employs 22 physicians and a support

staff of 125, who provide services in medicine, pediatrics, allergy, laboratory, X ray, pharmacy, optometry, optical sales, and obstetrics/gynecology. The Fairfield Medical Offices are a relatively recent addition to the system, opening in June 1985. Because of membership growth, Fairfield services are quickly outgrowing the building. In addition to the services offered at Napa, Fairfield's 53 physicians and 180 staff members provide services in urology; ear, nose, and throat; physical therapy; both ambulatory and general surgery; dermatology; and orthopedics.

Kaiser Permanente combines inpatient and outpatient facilities to permit maximum efficiency in



the use of offices, hospitals, and services such as X ray, pharmacy, and the laboratory. This not only avoids unnecessary duplication but also assures that a wide array of services is available. Since Kaiser Permanente actually provides or arranges its care, rather than simply paying the bills, it can control both the quality and cost of that care. The resulting emphasis on preventive care and early intervention in illness benefits both the program and its members.

Kaiser Permanente considers community involvement to be one of its responsibilities, and the Vallejo Medical Center is no exception to

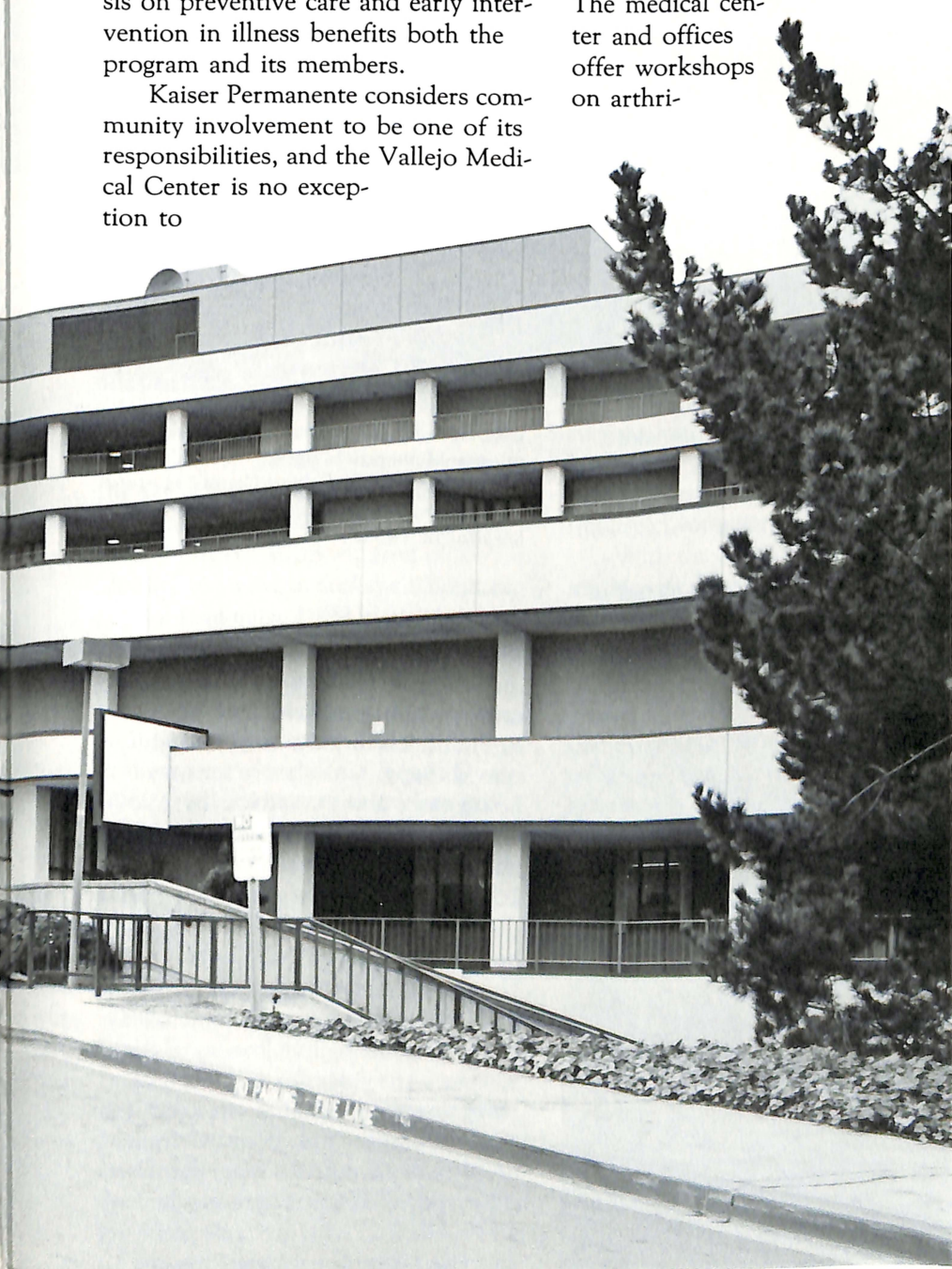
that belief. The hospital provides charitable care at its emergency department and, most notably, at the Rehabilitation Center. Public health education is another important area of contribution. The Regional Audio/Visual Department loans health-related films and videocassettes to schools, corporations, and other health providers. The medical center and offices offer workshops on arthri-

tis, diabetes, and high blood pressure; classes in childbirth preparation, stress management, and CPR; and programs to stop smoking. One of the most popular educational efforts is Professor Bodywise's Traveling Menagerie, a live theatrical performance promoting health and safety at the elementary-school level. The award-winning program is designed to supplement the schools' existing health education curricula.

Kaiser's Northern California Region contributes some \$250,000 yearly in community grants through its Regional Contributions Program. Grants are awarded to a variety of organizations working to enhance access to health care and related human services. Recent grants in Solano County have included \$4,000 to Solano Community College's disabled students program to aid in the purchase of a pool lift for its adaptive physical education program, \$4,000 to the county's Youth and Family Services to expand its substance abuse and delinquency programs, and \$5,000 to the Solano County Child Abuse Prevention Council to support expansion of its Parents Anonymous program and to train volunteers for support services.

The Kaiser Permanente Medical Center-Vallejo is in the midst of developing a new community relations plan to encourage and coordinate employee participation in community programs. The volunteer program encourages administrators and support personnel as well as physicians to donate their time and skills.

Kaiser Permanente Medical Center-Vallejo provides the most comprehensive health care to the residents of Solano County and is in the forefront in community medical education and grants provided by the Regional Contributions Programs.



NORTHBAY HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

The NorthBay Healthcare System is a local nonprofit organization dedicated to the health care needs of communities in Solano County and the North Bay region.

Community support was the impetus behind the construction of NorthBay's first hospital, Intercommunity Memorial Hospital (now NorthBay Medical Center), in 1960. Originally a 32-bed facility with 45 employees, Intercommunity Memorial no longer met the needs of its growing community by 1964. A neighboring 48-bed convalescent hospital was leased as a patient care annex and was purchased in 1967.

As the area's population continued to grow, the workloads and space requirements for many patient care departments increased dramatically. By 1970 it became clear that a new hospital would have to be constructed to care for the increasing patient population and to meet the

Community support for the new Intercommunity Memorial Hospital was evidenced by the crowds that showed up for tours on opening day in 1960.



state's more stringent earthquake safety standards. In March 1974, after a community fund-raising drive, construction began on a new 80-bed structure.

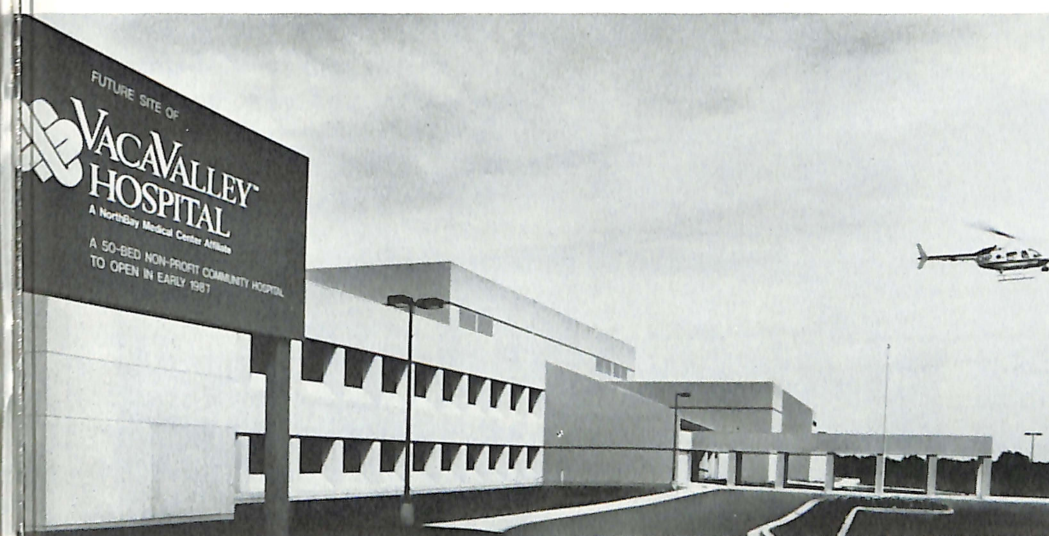
The new hospital, completed in

Ground-breaking ceremonies for Intercommunity Memorial Hospital were held in 1959. The Central Solano County Hospital Foundation had purchased the land for the hospital in 1955.

1977, doubled the available floor space and added many new services, including intensive and critical care units, nuclear medicine, pathology, EEG and EKG, cardiology, rehabilitation therapy, ambulatory surgery, home care, and pediatrics. By 1980 continuing community growth necessitated the opening of an additional 26-bed wing.

In 1985 the hospital added a three-bed Intensive Care Newborn Nursery for premature and critically ill newborns, and was designated by the state as the regional neonatal intensive care provider for Solano and Napa counties. Lifeline, an electronic communication link between frail, elderly persons and the hospital emergency room, began operating in May 1985.

The latest innovations are the



NorthBay Cancer Center and the NorthBay Hospice. Opened in April 1987, the cancer center is a coordinated program of comprehensive cancer prevention, detection, treatment, rehabilitation, and support services. The hospice, which began its operations in December 1987, is Solano County's first system of care for terminally ill patients and their families. It provides medical, social, and volunteer support, free of charge, to patients and their families.

In February 1983 the need for a hospital in Vacaville became apparent through a survey of residents, in which 83 percent favored the construction of a local hospital. The community's perceived need, along with projected population growth of 31 percent in the Vacaville-Dixon area, led local businesses, physicians, and the general public to begin a fund-development campaign, called Partners in Progress—Investing in a Healthy Future, in 1984. The PIP campaign, as it was known, raised \$1.2 million to help build the new hospital and expand the Fairfield facilities. Ground was broken on a seven-acre Vacaville site in August 1985, and NorthBay opened its second facility, VacaValley Hospital, on July 1, 1987.

In addition to offering 24-hour

The 50-bed VacaValley Hospital, which opened in July 1987, is the first full-service hospital in the Vacaville area.

emergency care, VacaValley Hospital provides 44 medical-surgical beds, a six-bed intensive care unit, two surgery suites, a clinical laboratory, a pharmacy, and a fully equipped radiology department that includes a computerized tomography scanner.

With the construction of VacaValley Hospital, the Central Solano County Hospital Foundation, which had built both hospitals, was restructured to more efficiently manage the growing health care system. A parent company, NorthBay Healthcare Corporation, and three subsidiary organizations—NorthBay Hospital Group,

NorthBay Healthcare Foundation, and NorthBay Healthcare Services—were established.

NorthBay Healthcare Corporation manages and supports the activities of the entire system, providing services commonly needed by all companies, such as financial, human resources, marketing and planning, and public relations. The NorthBay Hospital Group operates the two full-service hospitals, in addition to hospital-related clinical services, such as NorthBay Health at Home, the NorthBay Cancer Center, and NorthBay Rehabilitation Services.

NorthBay Healthcare Foundation raises funds to support the nonprofit activities of the system and gives community members the opportunity to actively support the cause of local health care. NorthBay Healthcare Services develops new business ventures and real estate opportunities related to health care.

NorthBay Healthcare Corporation's aim is to complete its transformation from a "hospital" to a "health care organization" that can skillfully respond to the health care needs of all parts of the community. As the community and its health care needs grow, so will the NorthBay system.

Construction of the new NorthBay Hospital in Vacaville began in late 1985.



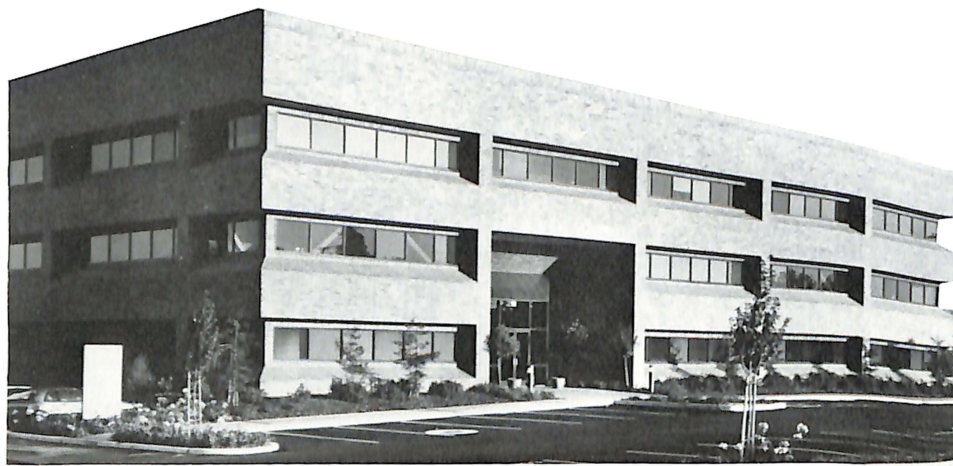
CARL RECKNAGEL GENERAL CONTRACTORS, INC.

Carl Recknagel General Contractors, Inc., located in Fairfield, is a major Solano County building contractor. Founded in 1944, the firm specializes in commercial and public works projects.

Founder Carl Recknagel was born in Milwaukee and moved with his family to Solano County in 1917. He attended Vallejo schools and graduated from Stanford University with a degree in civil engineering. In 1936 Recknagel became the first chief building inspector for the City of Vallejo, and served in that position for 10 years. In 1946 he established Carl Recknagel General Contractors, serving as president until 1972. Carl now holds the position of vice-president, having named his son, Tom, president in 1972.

Tom Recknagel spent his summers and other vacations working on construction jobs for his father and gained an early desire to enter the profession. He tailored his education to that end, graduating from the University of California at Santa Barbara with a degree in business economics and obtaining his M.B.A. from San Jose State University.

C. Thomas Recknagel succeeded his father, Carl, as president of Carl Recknagel General Contractors, Inc., in 1972.



Carl Recknagel was the general contractor for the award-winning Gateway Medical Plaza in Fairfield.

The firm has enjoyed steady growth during the years and has been the prime contractor for many Solano County landmarks—banks, office buildings, department stores, and restaurants. Public projects include numerous schools, fire stations, county buildings, parks, and the Fairfield Public Safety Building. Carl Recknagel General Contractors, Inc., has completed many projects for the NorthBay Medical Center in Fairfield and the Sutter-Solano Medical Center in Vallejo; it recently completed a helipad for emergency helicopters for NorthBay. A current project is the construction of the clubhouse, restaurant, and tennis facilities at Rancho Solano, the area's new golf course and residential complex.

Carl and Tom support profes-

sional, civic, and charitable organizations in the Solano County community. Carl was a founding member of the Solano-Napa Builders' Exchange, which now has more than 400 members, and both Carl and Tom are past presidents of the organization. They have been active with the Vallejo and Fairfield-Suisun chambers of commerce, Kiwanis, and local athletic organizations, and are supporters of the NorthBay Medical Center, the Sutter-Solano Medical Center, the Vallejo Historical Society, the Vallejo Symphony, and the Fairfield Senior Center.

Carl Recknagel General Contractors, Inc., was the general contractor for several Solano County structures that received outstanding building awards. These include the Aerie Medical Building in Vacaville, Santa Barbara Savings and Loan (now Gibraltar Savings) in Fairfield, and Gateway Medical Plaza in Fairfield.

It is with great pleasure that Carl and Tom Recknagel have participated in the beautification and growth of Solano County. Carl Recknagel General Contractors, Inc., is proud to be a part of Solano County's progress and continued prosperity.



FIRST NORTHERN BANK

Back in 1910 a group of Dixon residents believed they weren't getting the kind of banking services they needed and decided to do something about it. On January 20 of that year, 25 people met at the Dixon Alfalfa Land Company.

In the spirit of the independent, do-it-yourself tradition of their farming community, these residents organized a local bank that very day, to be backed with all-local capital and no outside investment or affiliation. Those present elected a board of directors, and authorized \$100,000 of capital stock of which they paid in \$60,000. They then appointed a committee to go to San Francisco to obtain a safe and other necessary supplies.

Twelve days later, on February 1, 1910, Northern Solano Bank was in business in a remodeled former ice cream parlor at approximately 185 North First Street. New depositors were subtly persuaded with notes in the personal column of the *Dixon Tribune*. " . . . Eighty of your friends have started, why not you?" By March 1910 the bank had 93 accounts with deposits totaling \$75,304.55. Two months later there were 180 depositors, representing \$101,648.84 in accounts.

By the following year the bank had purchased the Old Corner property at North First and B streets.

The coveted location was secured by the directors after heated bidding against the Bank of Dixon. A portion of the structure was torn down and replaced by a new bank building. The institution's main offices are at the same site today and dominate the block, but back then the bank shared it with a haberdashery, a harness maker, the Wells Fargo Express Company, Pacific Telephone, and a cigar maker.

The following year the First National Bank was established under a federal charter. For the next 43 years it operated under the same roof and with the same management as Northern Solano Savings Bank, a state bank. The two enterprises were consolidated in 1955 as First National Bank of Dixon, which converted to a state-chartered institution as First Northern Bank in 1980.

The bank continued to grow and evolve from a small farm bank to a full-service financial institution addressing the needs of the area's growing population. In 1962, when the bank celebrated its 52nd anniversary, deposits had increased from the original capital stock of \$100,000 to \$7.7 million. That year the directors decided to tear down the old bank building and construct a new one. In 1970 the bank expanded from its Dixon base by open-

ing its first branch in Winters. The Davis branch followed in 1976, and the West Sacramento branch in 1983, the same year in which a Real Estate Department was opened in Davis. Vacaville was added to the Solano/Yolo network in 1985.

First Northern Bank today is a commercial bank serving the business, personal, and real estate requirements of Solano and Yolo counties. At year-end 1988 the locally owned community bank boasted 143 employees, with total assets of \$145.7 million, deposits of \$132.4 million, loans totaling \$107 million, and shareholders' equity of \$12 million.

Throughout its history First Northern Bank has remained faithful to its roots as an institution formed to address specific personalized needs, and continues to serve such needs for the people of the communities it serves.

The directors of First Northern Bank are all residents of the communities served by the bank. Standing (left to right): William H. Jones, Jr., Dixon; John H. Griffin, Winters; David W. Schulze, Davis; Richard J. Rico, Vacaville; Diane P. Trower, Davis; Donald M. Moriel, Vacaville; and John W. Kilkenney, Jr., and Albert A. Gondry, Dixon. Seated are Ronald J. DuPratt, chairman; John F. Hamel, president and chief executive officer; and Richard H. Raycraft, vice-chairman, all of Dixon.



AUTOMATIC BAR CONTROLS, INC.



Automatic Bar Controls, Inc., moved to its modern Vacaville facility in 1985.

Automatic Bar Controls, Inc., of Vacaville, California, is a manufacturer of beverage dispensing equipment and several control systems for the bar and restaurant industry. The firm's manufactured products include soft drink, juice, and wine dispensers, and complete liquor control dispensing systems with electronic interfacing to cash registers and computers.

William Martindale, president, was first engaged in this industry in 1958 and installed, in Concord, the first flexible-hose soda dispenser seen in Northern California. During the 1960s lighted product buttons, replaceable electric switch packs, saline injectors, and other important product features were introduced to the industry.

In 1973 the firm developed a liquor control dispensing system as, for the first time, a complete major appliance, with all component parts and subassemblies completely assembled and wet checked at the factory. In that same year the first 12-brand liquor control system employing flex hose dispensers ever installed was placed in service at the Mansion Inn (now a Clarion Hotel) in Sacramento, California. This Complete Major Appliance concept has provided the industry with a product of consistently high quality without dependence on the expertise of local area installers.



Automatic Bar Controls was incorporated in 1974, with Richard Martindale as vice-president and general manager and Patricia Martindale as secretary/treasurer. This closely held family corporation has, since 1974, shown growth at an annual compound rate of 25 percent. The company's industry position is number one in the manufacture and distribution of mechanical post mix dispensers, wine dispensers, and juice dispensers. With the addition of a Sheffield, England, distribution plant and ever increasing export activity, the company has embarked on the construction of an addition to its exist-

ing plant.

After occupying several leased sites over the years in Alameda, San Leandro, and Oakland, California, the factory was moved to Vacaville, California, and built there a modern 30,000-square-foot facility located in a newly developed 1,700-acre industrial park. This new factory features computer-controlled robotic systems for machining parts to very close toler-

William Martindale (right) started the firm in 1958. Richard Martindale joined his father in 1971.

ances (plus or minus 400 millionths of an inch!).

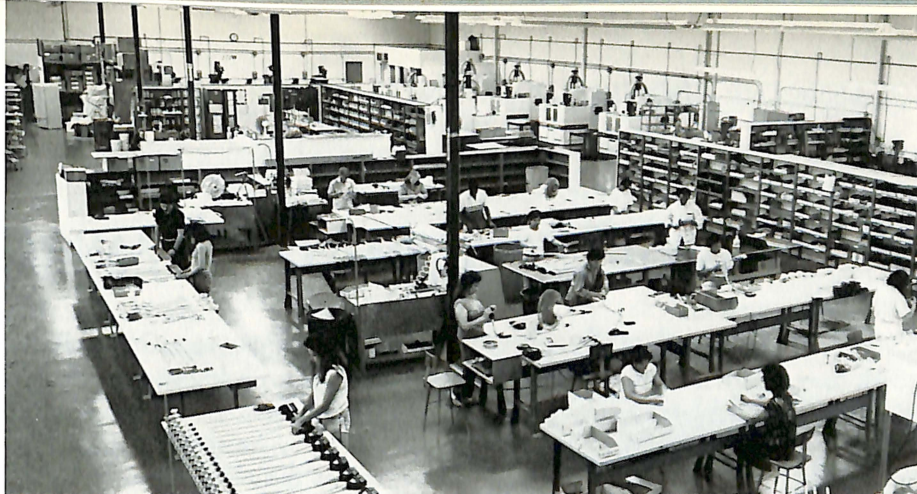
Since 1980 the company has manufactured mechanical (non-electric) flex hose dispensers for soda, wine, and juice applications. These products have proven to be far superior in their overall performance and serviceability to those dispensers employing electric solenoid valves. For the liquor control industry, Automatic Bar Controls' Wunder Bar systems provide bar operations with accurate

accountability through micro-processor interfacing with electronic cash registers and computers.

Portable bars are manufactured with all procedures, including laminating the bars, completed in the firm's fully equipped wood shop. This product is in demand by large hotel and casino operations to cover their special events. Complete portable bars are exported, including shipments to Japan.

Vacaville was chosen for the location of the plant facility, completed in October 1985, because of its location midway between Sacramento (California's state capital) and San Francisco. Positioned at the intersection of interstate highways 80 and 505 (north to Oregon) the factory is serviced by both the Sacramento and Oakland international airports. Vacaville schools consistently rate among the top 10 percent in the state of California. Housing costs, when compared with those of San Francisco and the peninsula areas, are more affordable. Overall, with its warm valley climate; its close proximity to San Francisco (50 minutes), Sacramento (35 minutes), and Lake Tahoe (2.5 hours); and its relatively less urbanized complexion, Vacaville

In order to produce the best product possible, computer-controlled robotic stations can machine parts within tolerances of 400 millionths of an inch.



Above: Custom bar installations and bar dispensers are prepared at the firm's 30,000-square-foot plant.



Left: Because Automatic Bar Control's bar dispensers work hydraulically rather than electrically, service problems caused by a wet environment are almost eliminated.

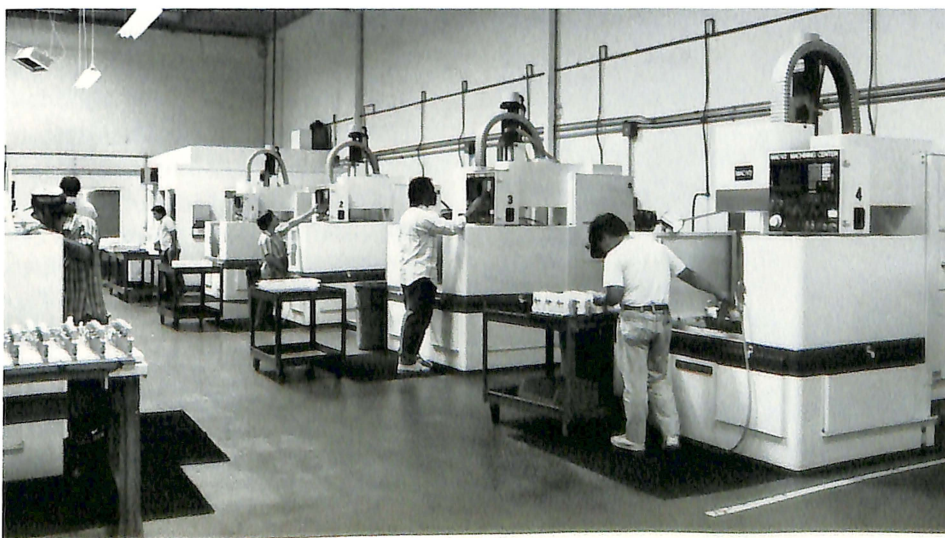
offers an altogether better life-style to its citizens.

The company's 70 factory employees are provided with the cleanest, safest work environment in the beverage equipment manufacturing industry. Extra emphasis is placed upon adequate, carefully trained supervisors who are required to remain in close communication with all factory personnel. Supervisors are "on the floor" and "in touch" throughout each work shift. Eligible employees participate in a generous profit-sharing plan. Other work incentives, including television sets, VCRs, and Hawaiian vacations, are offered to

stimulate employee enthusiasm and motivation. Each employee is constantly and repeatedly impressed with the company's rigid insistence upon the maintenance of its unusually high quality-control standards. Each and every dispenser manufactured is wet checked and certified before its shipment.

In February 1987 a branch distribution facility was opened in Sheffield, England. This warehouse stocks equipment and distributes the factory's products throughout the United Kingdom. Exports, in most recent years, have become an increasingly important and growing part of the company's marketing efforts. Shipments are made to Sweden, Spain, Italy, France, Canada, South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Latin America, and England.

The company's research and development department has on its staff a University of California, Berkeley, graduate industrial engineer, and an electronics engineer. In addition, very significant engineering and design contributions have been made over the years by Hawley Laboratories, Berkeley, California. With its staff engineers and the contributions made by Hawley Labs, Automatic Bar Controls arguably has the best engineering and design capability in its industry. New products, as well as improvements to existing products, are constantly under development and testing.



HERMAN GOELITZ CANDY COMPANY, INC.

"Candy runs very thick in our blood," says Herman Goelitz Rowland, Sr., chairman of the board of Fairfield's Herman Goelitz Candy Company. Rowland is a grandson of the founder, Herman Goelitz, and great-grandson of Gustav Goelitz, who with his brother Albert, started in the candy business in 1898.

With the blessings of his family, Herman Goelitz left Chicago, where he had been in business with his brothers, Adolph and Gustav Jr., and his brother-in-law, Edward Kelley, and started his own business in Portland, Oregon, in 1918. Four years later he moved his business to Oakland, California. The Herman Goelitz Candy Company specialized in candy corn, which formed 80 percent of the company's sales volume, and other seasonal butter creams and novelties. In 1935 Herman Goelitz took his son-in-law, Ernie Rowland, as a partner. Ernie was instrumental in bringing the company successfully through the years following the Depression and the war years, and was especially talented in the design and improvement of candy-making machinery.

Chairman of the board of Herman Goelitz Candy Company, Inc., and fourth-generation candy maker Herman G. Rowland, Sr., assists Jelly Belly in the ribbon-cutting ceremony in honor of the March 1986 opening of the company's new factory.

Ernie's son, Herman Goelitz Rowland, Sr., grew up knowing he would some day head the family business. As a boy he spent most summers at the plant, learning both the mechanics and science of candy making. When he joined the company on a full-time basis in 1959, he rotated through all the jobs, from cooking to driving trucks and making sales calls. He was named president of the firm in 1975.

With the company still dependent on candy corn and only marginally profitable, Rowland began diversifying the product line, adding chocolate items, bridge mixes, Jordan almonds, French peanuts, and a small high-quality jelly bean called Mini Jelly Beans. The jelly bean, introduced in 1965, was flavored and colored throughout, rather than only on the outside as was customary. This item impressed a Southern California entrepreneur named Dave Klein, who came to Goelitz in 1976 with a new idea. Dave's idea was to use natural ingredients for flavoring whenever possible and to offer these jelly beans in individual flavors.

Klein's Jelly Belly bean, with the assistance of Klein's marketing and promotional skills, was soon a hit. As it became a substantial part of Goelitz' production, the candy company acquired the rights to the Jelly Belly name and trademark.

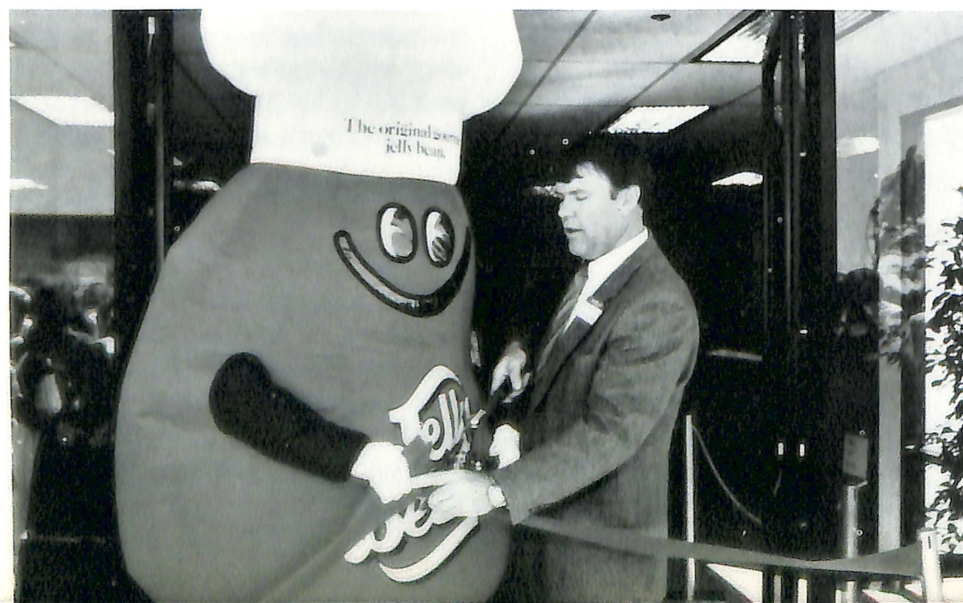


Herman Goelitz (right) with his brother-in-law, Edward F. Kelley, who was associated with the Chicago Goelitz Confectionery Company. Both their grandsons continue the family business today.

While the Jelly Belly beans had been an immediate success, they became a national mania with President Ronald Reagan's inauguration. Goelitz had quietly supplied Reagan with jelly beans from the time he was California governor, but the intense publicity about the president's favorite candy generated enough orders to require around-the-clock shifts, as well as the tripling of the work force and the purchase of new manufacturing equipment. Within a year it was apparent the company would need a new factory.

In March 1986 the firm moved to its new Fairfield plant, which, even though capable of six times the volume of the old plant, is now running at full capacity. Future plans include doubling the production volume within the next five years, as well as improving distribution.

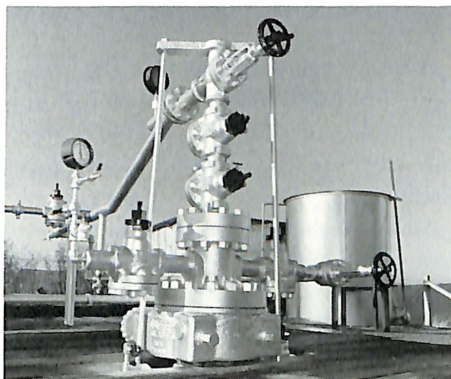
Now the world's largest manufacturer of gourmet jelly beans, Herman Goelitz Candy Company, Inc., is still a family operation. With the addition of family members to the firm's personnel and the purchase of Goelitz Confectionery Company in Chicago by Herman Goelitz Candy Company and William Kelley, president of Goelitz Confectionery Company, the family shows every sign of continuing its candy-making tradition.



PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) was incorporated in San Francisco on October 10, 1905, and today is comprised of more than 520 predecessor companies that consolidated with PG&E over the past 100 years.

In Solano County, those predecessor companies were California Gas and Electric Company (1901), the Vacaville Water and Light Company (1890), the Vacaville Water and Power Company (1919), the Dixon Light and Water Company (1891), the Dixon Electric Power and Water Company (1903), the Rio Vista Electric Light and Power Company



Pacific Gas and Electric Company has connected gas wells and transmission lines from the Rio Vista gas fields for use in the Solano County area.

(1905), and the Natural Gas Corporation (1930).

The historic Vaca-Dixon Electric Substation, located on Interstate 80 east of Vacaville at Midway Road, was built in 1922 to receive electric power generated at the Pit No. 1 Hydroelectric Power Plant on the Pit River in Shasta County, more than 200 miles away. On September 30 residents of Vacaville and the surrounding area paraded to the substation where they met similar groups from Dixon, Sacramento, and other Central California communities to celebrate its opening. Between 5,000 and 6,000 people gathered to see the

first power transmitted. As an electric motor raised the American flag, the crowd sang the national anthem; refreshments were served on the substation grounds, followed by music and dancing until midnight. Vaca-Dixon still operates today, serving as a central electric substation distributing power to Solano County and PG&E's Bay Area service territory.

PG&E was quick to recognize the mutual advantages of the partnership it had with the agricultural community, and in 1914 it launched an elaborate pump testing survey of 85 Solano County pumps in Dixon. A crew was equipped with measuring instruments to record the amount of power used and the quantity of water lifted by each pump to determine its operating efficiency. This survey was the beginning of the pump test service still offered today to PG&E's agricultural customers.

In 1937 natural gas from a group of gas wells in the Montezuma Hills near Rio Vista proved to be so substantial that PG&E invested more than one million dollars in gas transmission lines. The Rio Vista gas fields are now regarded as one of the most important natural gas sources in the PG&E system.

PG&E currently serves a population of 11 million people in Northern and Central California and has

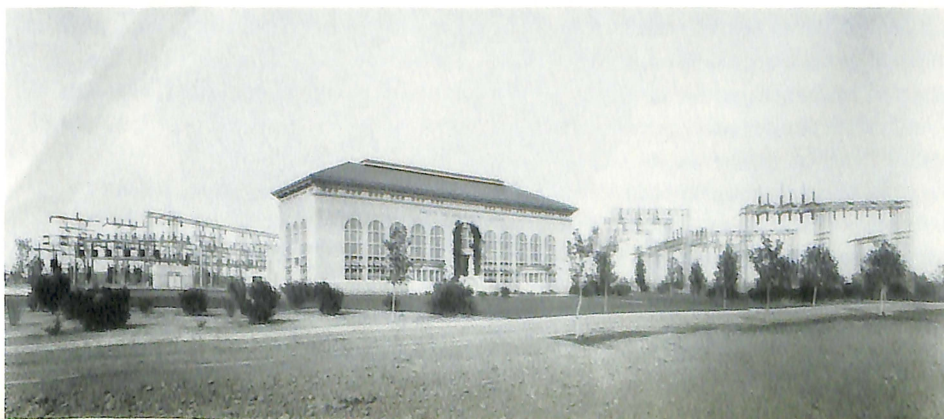
The historic Vaca-Dixon Electric Substation was built in 1922 to receive electric power generated at the Pit No. 1 Hydroelectric Power Plant more than 200 miles north.



This pump test is offered to Pacific Gas and Electric Company agricultural customers to measure the amount of power used and quantity of water lifted, which determines the pump's operating efficiency.

3.9 million electric customers and 3.2 million gas customers. The company produces electricity from a variety of sources, including fossil fuel (natural gas and oil), hydroelectric, geothermal steam, wind, solar, and nuclear. Natural gas is supplied from Canada, Texas, and California gas fields through PG&E's 5,000 miles of gas transmission lines.

PG&E's Vaca Valley Division was created June 1, 1986, during the company's reorganization that established 28 operating divisions in six regions. With its headquarters in Vacaville, the division serves 97,000 gas and 125,000 electric customers in upper Solano and Yolo counties.



CAVANAGH ACCOUNTANCY CORPORATION



Michael F. Cavanagh, managing director of Cavanagh Accountancy Corporation, established the public accounting firm in 1980, after several years with Price Waterhouse in San Francisco. The firm, which was honored to be Fairfield-Suisun Business of the Year in 1984, mainly serves clients in the manufacturing, construction, and land development industries.

Cavanagh believes that his firm offers the skills and expertise provided by the large national accounting firms, but has the additional advantage of being able to establish a close working relationship with clients. Such a relationship allows the firm to understand the client's business thoroughly in order to provide creative and constructive business advice in addition to opinions on financial statements and tax planning.

In addition to its traditional accounting services, Cavanagh Accountancy Corporation has also developed expertise in microcomputer consulting, to assist those companies desiring the maximum return from their computer investment. With numerous clients in the construction industry, the firm under-

Cavanagh Accountancy Corporation has served the Solano County area since it was established by Michael F. Cavanagh in 1980.

took a major comparative study of the microcomputer software packages available for contractors and builders to determine the best package for the industry.

Michael Cavanagh, a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, has been a resident of the Fairfield-Suisun area since 1978. He is an active member of the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce, having served terms on its board of directors, its legislative and business education committees, and as a chamber ambassador, and is also a member of the Benicia Chamber of Commerce. Cavanagh is a member of the board of directors of North Bay Suicide Prevention, Inc., and has served as local chairman of the United Way campaign. Cavanagh and his wife, Leslie, have two sons, David and Richard.

Denton E. Connor, a shareholder and director of the firm, moved to Vacaville to join Cavanagh Accountancy in 1984. Connor gradu-

ated from Western Washington University with degrees in business and accounting, and earned his CPA certification in 1987. He is active in the Vacaville-Fairfield Young Men's 20-30 Club and the Vacaville Chamber of Commerce.

Also a graduate of Western Washington University, where she was recognized as the outstanding senior in accounting, Catherine A. Udd joined Cavanagh Accountancy Corporation in 1985. She earned her CPA certificate in 1987 and is now a manager with the firm. Udd is a member of the Walnut Creek Chamber of Commerce and is active with the Solano Chapter of Leads to Success.

All three CPAs are members of both the California Society of Certified Public Accountants and the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

Cavanagh Accountancy Corporation plans to grow along with its clients and Solano County in general, but will never lose the local identity and personal relationships with clients that it considers the foundation of its business.

Denton Connor, a director of the firm, with the sophisticated, state-of-the-art tax-processing computer system.



CAL YEE FARMS

Sometime after 1890 Yee Chew Yong immigrated to the United States from the Guangdong province of China. He settled in the Sacramento Delta area, working first as a farm laborer, and later renting land to farm for himself. In 1908 his 18-year-old-son, Yee Eng, joined him in California.

Soon after the end of World War I, Yee Eng rented a 20-acre fruit orchard in the Mankas Corner section of Suisun Valley. With his new wife, Yuen Fong Mun, whom Yee Chew Yong had brought from China for his son in 1923, Yee Eng raised four sons and a daughter.

Christopher, the oldest, studied business administration at the University of California, Berkeley, and received his M.B.A. in 1955. The sec-

ond son, George, studied industrial arts at San Jose State, and the third, Peter, was sent to the University of California at Davis to study pomology. The daughter, Eva, majored in education at San Jose State, and Donald, the youngest son, graduated from the National School of Gasoline and Diesel Mechanics in Los Angeles.

Cal Yee Farms began as a fruit-drying business that Christopher and George Yee started while they were in college. Hotter than other parts of Suisun Valley, the Mankas Corner area was ideal for drying fruit, and the family purchased the rented orchard in 1951 to build a modern fruit-drying plant. By 1955 the two brothers were doing a substantial volume of business drying apricots and pears, and had built a new cutting shed, sulphur houses, storage sheds, a pear dehydrator, and a camp for migrant workers.

During their first decade in business the Yees sold their products to independent packers such as Abinante & Nola Packing Company of San Jose. Sam Abinante was always given

first choice of the Yee products.

In China dried fruits are usually preserved with licorice and are consumed as candy in the United States. Christopher Yee concluded that Hawaii was the best market for such Chinese-style dried fruits, and the family began shipping these to the islands in 1958. Salted squash seeds, still popular today in Hawaii and in Chinese communities nationwide and in Canada, were also added to the product line in 1958.

Not wishing to compete with Abinante & Nola when Abinante had been so generous in his dealings with them, the Yees did not enter the dried fruit packing business until the mid-1960s, when Abinante & Nola had gone out of business. After a slow start, the firm became quite successful selling packaged dried mixed fruits, apricots, and pears. Cal Yee now handles about 1,000 tons of apricots, 1,100 tons of peaches, 500 tons of pears, and 400 tons of nectarines annually. Half the crop is kept for the family packing business, and the other half is sold to packers, such as Del Monte and Sunsweet.

The firm's responsibilities are now divided among the four Yee brothers. Christopher is general manager and George is responsible for all machinery, equipment, and buildings. Peter manages the fruit orchards, as well as wholesaling and retailing, including the successful retail shop at the plant. Donald is in charge of maintenance and repair of machinery and equipment.

Below: Yee Chew Yong came to the United States in 1890 and worked on farms in the Sacramento Delta until after World War II, when he retired to China.

Below, right: Yee Eng joined his father in California in 1908 and later moved to the Suisun Valley, where the family fruit-drying business operates today.



CREDIT BUREAU OF FAIRFIELD

The consumer demand for new houses, cars, and household goods at the end of World War II led to a major increase in the need for credit information. In Fairfield, that need was met by Duane and Marge Parks, who founded the Credit Bureau of Fairfield after moving to the area from Iowa.

The firm, originally located on Texas Street, soon moved to Jackson Street, into a building designed to accommodate the new Diebold elevator files. With the continuing growth of Solano County's population, the bureau maintained approximately 45,000 credit files for its member business firms.

In 1973 the Parks retired and sold the credit bureau to Charles and Dorothy Goldmann, who had moved to the area from Oregon in 1965. Charles A. Goldmann had worked in the credit industry since 1957, and had been transferred by

his company to Walnut Creek. Shortly after purchasing the business, the Goldmanns moved to Fairfield.

The firm's growth has continued to parallel that of the Solano County area. The 45,000 files have grown to approximately 110,000, and the six employees of 1973 have been increased to the now 22 people working for the credit bureau. Its operations are now also fully computerized. In 1979 the bureau became affiliated with CBI-Equifax of Atlanta, Georgia. All credit files were converted to electronic form and loaded into a national data bank. The bureau can now supply credit information on anyone in the United States, Puerto Rico, and Guam directly through its terminals.

In 1983 the credit bureau moved to its present location on Union Street in Fairfield, again to accommodate its growing size. Managed by the Goldmanns and their daughter, Kathy Parsons, the organization provides more than 18,000 credit reports each month to retailers, banks, automobile dealers, finance compa-



Charles A. Goldmann, president of the Credit Bureau of Fairfield. Photo by Gittings

nies, landlords, mortgage lenders, professional firms, and commercial organizations.

Collections are also a major service of the credit bureau. Handled on a cardless computer system, the firm's professional collectors recover one million dollars annually for their clients.

The credit bureau takes seriously its responsibility to report accurate information to credit granters. Credit bureaus are regulated by both state and federal law, and consumers have the right to obtain copies of their credit files. Similarly, the firm's collectors are trained to collect money in an ethical manner while doing everything they can within the law to recover bad debt losses.

Long active in community organizations and civic affairs, Charles Goldmann is currently president of the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce. He is also chairman of the board of his industry's trade association, Associated Credit Bureaus, Inc. With offices in Houston and Washington, D.C., the association has 1,407 credit-reporting members and 981 collecting service members.

The Credit Bureau of Fairfield, which provides both credit reporting and collections services for its clients, moved to larger quarters on Union Street in 1983.



THE BENCON GROUP



William Cawley and his wife, Leeann, in front of one of the spin-offs from The Bencon Group—Ask Mr. Foster/All World Travel—which Leeann manages.

The Bencon Group, comprising several operating companies, has been involved in much of the new construction in Solano County and the Bay Area in recent years.

Founder William Cawley received his early training in the construction business from his father, a plumbing contractor. After high school Bill began work as an apprentice with Billings Plumbing in Concord, learning the business aspects of the trade along with his plumbing skills.

In 1975 Bill and his wife, Leeann, founded Benicia Plumbing, Inc., the first of Bencon's operating companies. Managed by Doug Kuznik, Benicia Plumbing designs and installs plumbing, as well as fire protection systems, for residential, commercial, and industrial projects.

The firm had a large fleet of plumbing trucks, and this naturally led to the establishment of Channel Fleet Repair, managed by Ken Ingram. Originally known as Benicia Automotive and Truck Maintenance, the company repairs and services Bencon's equipment.

Cawley then expanded his operation with Channel Pipeline, Inc., which installs underground utilities and piping, including water mains, sewer mains, and storm drain lines. Channel Pipeline is managed by Steve Barba.

Realizing that managing his own trucking firm would allow him better control of both delivery and excavation hauling of materials, Cawley added Channel Trucking, Inc., to his growing group of companies. In addition to hauling sand, gravel, and rock for the other Bencon companies, Channel Trucking serves the construction industry at large in the greater Bay Area. Ron Kultti manages the firm, whose fleet includes transfers, end dumps, water trucks, and low boys.

Bolder Construction was founded in 1986 and is managed by John Gardenhire, with plans to expand into general contracting.

Just recently spun off from The Bencon Group into its own company is The Cawley Travel Group. Managed by Leeann, Ask Mr. Foster/All World Travel's main office is in Benicia, with two offices in Vallejo and one in Fairfield. The company, the largest travel agency in Solano County, plans further expansion.

Cawley gives much of the credit for The Bencon Group's success to his strong core of managers and to the controller, Karen Ramey. Good employee relations are also crucial to success, insists Bill. Along with the pension and profit-sharing plans he offers, Cawley keeps up morale with frequent company get-togethers.

Both Bill and Leeann have been active in community affairs. Each has served a term as president of the Benicia Chamber of Commerce. Bill has also served as president of the Benicia Kiwanis Club and the Plumbing, Heating, and Cooling Contractors of Napa/Solano. He is particularly proud of his work as chairman of the Joint Apprenticeship Committee. Leeann has been president of both the Benicia Soroptimist Club and the Benicia Business & Professional Women's Club, and has served as a member of the Civil Service and Planning Commissions of Benicia.

Also keeping the pair busy are Bill's son Billy, a sophomore at Solano Community College, and daughter Lori, a junior at Armijo High School, and the couple's six-year-old son, Patrick.

William Cawley (center) and members of the management team of The Bencon Group.



PRIVATE INDUSTRY COUNCIL OF SOLANO COUNTY, INC.



The Private Industry Council was incorporated in 1982 and derives its authority from the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The JTPA was the successor to a long line of federal employment training programs designed to enhance the employability of economically disadvantaged individuals. The basic premise of the JTPA is that successful employment training and placement programs must be developed and implemented at the local level with the full participation and support of the Solano business community in partnership with government, education, labor, and community service organizations.

The Council offers a comprehensive range of services to businesses through its Business Services Office located in Fairfield. The Council offers personnel services designed to match job openings with qualified applicants; contract resource services designed to help businesses access the government, public sector, and prime contractor marketplaces; and loan packaging services designed to assist small businesses locate sources of financing. The Council is a cosponsor of the Small Business Administration Center, which provides advice and expertise to small businesses.

The association publishes several economic development publications and business directories. It has re-

The Private Industry Council of Solano County's administration and business services center at 2220 Boynton Avenue, Fairfield.

cently updated and expanded the *Solano County Labor Market Analysis and Profile* and published, for the first time, the *Solano County Minority and Women-owned Business Directory*. Upon request specific labor and socioeconomic topics can be researched and custom reports prepared.

The Council has received much recognition and numerous awards for its work in Solano County. Chief among these awards are three received from the National Associa-

tion of Counties honoring work with Marine World-Africa USA to get jobs at the theme park for disadvantaged Solano County youth, development of the General Assistance Training and Employment Services program, and sponsorship of the Vacaville Summer Youth Corps program.

The purpose of all business services and publications offered by the Private Industry Council of Solano County is to create more jobs in Solano County, with the ultimate objective of providing meaningful career opportunities for unemployed and low-income county residents. Job training and placement services are offered to JTPA-eligible job applicants through two service centers located in Fairfield and Vallejo. After determining the job seeker's eligibility under the JTPA regulations, applicants are tested for job skills and pre-screened for specific job openings with employers utilizing the council's personnel services. Classroom and on-the-job training programs are available.

The Council's service center is at 601 Madison, Fairfield.



DAILY REPUBLIC

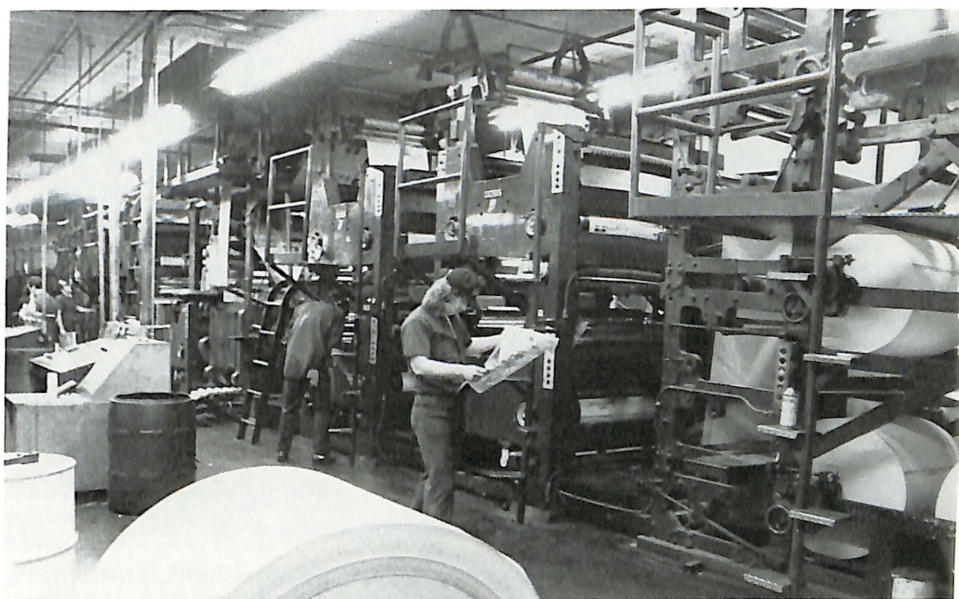
The *Daily Republic*, formerly a once-a-week afternoon newspaper, is today a seven-day morning newspaper with more than 160 employees and 200 carriers. The publication serves the communities of Fairfield and Suisun, and other areas in the North Bay.

The *Daily Republic* has moved several times since its establishment in 1854 in Suisun City. Reporter Ian Thompson, the paper's unofficial historian, says that much of the early history of the paper has been lost because of these moves. There have been several different owners, all local; since 1960 the paper has been principally owned by the McNaughton family, which also owns the *Davis Enterprise* and the *Placer-ville Mountain Democrat*.

The *Daily Republic* is now located on West Texas Street in Fairfield, in a building once occupied by Gillespie Cleaners. In 1988 the building underwent a fourth remodeling and expansion, which added 4,200 square feet of floor space. Publisher Craig Martin expects the remodeled offices to serve the paper into the next decade.

According to Martin, the *Daily Republic* strives to be the only newspaper its subscribers need to stay in-

The Daily Republic is located at 1250 West Texas Street in Fairfield. Shown is a rendering of the recently remodeled and expanded building.



formed, rather than just a local supplement to metropolitan dailies, such as the *San Francisco Chronicle* or *Examiner*. While the paper stresses local stories, it also covers national and international news more thoroughly than most other community papers. Martin believes that the proximity of Travis Air Force Base (the largest employer in the area) and the fact that a growing portion of the area's population consists of military retirees help account for the interest in world affairs. The *Daily Republic* supplements its news coverage with features, sports columns, editorials, business news, and arts information.

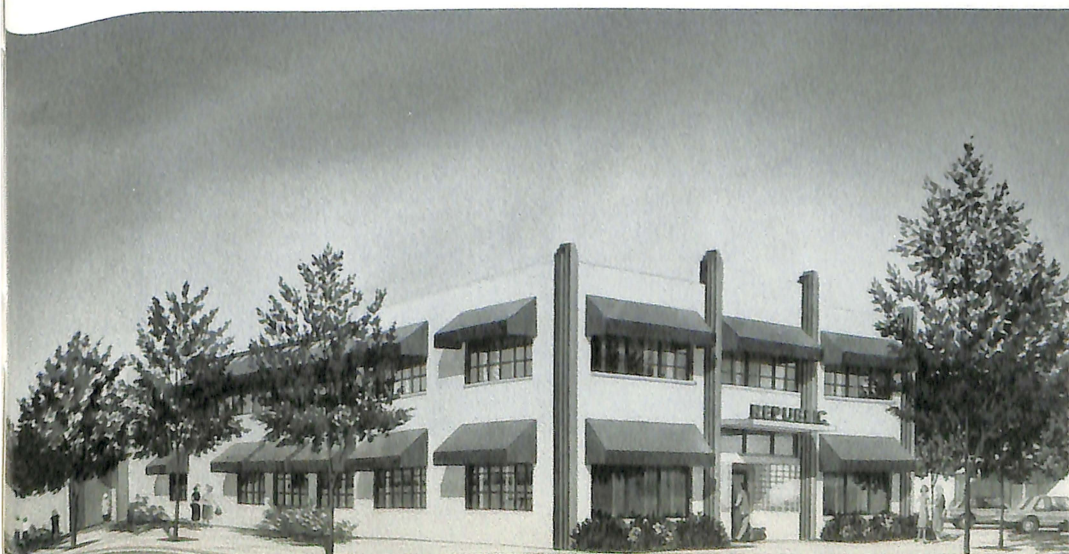
The arts page is only one exam-

The Daily Republic's nine-unit offset press prints a daily run of more than 20,000 newspapers.

ple of the *Daily Republic's* interest in supporting local cultural activities. Martin leads the Northern Solano Theater Foundation, which is working to establish a facility for live theater in the Fairfield-Suisun area.

The *Daily Republic* is a leading supporter of various community activities, including downtown Fairfield's annual Western Days celebration, the yearly Kiwanis Club Easter egg hunt, and Fairfield's community Christmas tree lighting. The newspaper is a strong backer of the United Way, the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce, Travis Military Affairs Committee, and the non-profit NorthBay Healthcare Corp., the only full-service hospital in the community.

The *Daily Republic* continually updates its production methods to implement the most modern technology. For example, color processing equipment has recently been added to supplement the existing nine-unit offset press, and the company has begun to add microcomputers to its business and news offices.



HOLIDAY INN OF FAIRFIELD



The Holiday Inn of Fairfield, which opened its doors in 1971, was the first full-service hotel in Solano County. It currently has 143 guest rooms and employs a full-time staff of 80, including seven managers. Major renovation of both the interior and exterior was completed in 1988.

The hotel's owner, Billy Yarbrough, came to California on a visit from Oklahoma in 1951. He worked as a cement finisher at the Benicia Arsenal, and then went to work for a small concrete contractor in Vallejo. In 1960 Yarbrough started his own company, Solano Concrete, and also began investing in real estate and building apartments in the Fairfield area.

In late 1969 Yarbrough was approached by Jerry Lane, who had a franchise for a Holiday Inn in Fairfield and needed help with the financing. Yarbrough became a partner in the venture, and his company became involved with the hotel's construction.

The Holiday Inn is a tilt-up building, in which lightweight concrete walls are set up and decked in. Construction began in 1970, and the Brock Hotel Corporation (now called Integra) was brought in to manage the facility. About 100 people, including representatives from the

A complete renovation of the exterior of the Holiday Inn of Fairfield was completed during the fall of 1988.

Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce, gathered for the grand opening on August 9, 1971.

Fairfield's population at the time was about 35,000, and much of the Holiday Inn's business came from servicemen stationed at Travis Air Force Base. The inn was a very busy place, with two bands playing in the

lounge on weekends, and attracted a relatively young crowd.

Changes in the needs of its guests, along with normal wear and tear on the buildings and their furnishings, dictated the major renovations that began in May 1985. Public areas of the hotel were completely redecorated with new, lighter-colored wall coverings, new carpet and furnishings, and improved lighting fixtures. The restaurant entrance was redesigned, and the entire dining area redecorated, with new tables and seating. The lounge, which no longer attracted the same weekend crowds, was converted to a warmer, more relaxed room, with more comfortable, upholstered seating.

The increase in the number of business travelers prompted many of the changes made in the guest rooms. While all of the rooms were redecorated and refurnished, 13 were redesigned especially for the business

Along with changes in the countryside, the clientele at the Holiday Inn has increased. The hotel now caters to more families and social functions as well as business guests.



traveler, with larger, well-lighted work surfaces, extra telephones, and oversized chairs with ottomans. Some rooms also include flip-top tables with room for five chairs to accommodate guests who wish to hold meetings in their hotel rooms. One guest room was converted to a conference room, with executive-style chairs, a media board, and serving credenza.

An executive suite with Japanese decor was created by combining two guest rooms. Sliding shoji screens separate the bedroom from the living room, which includes a comfortable sitting area and a built-in bar. The redesigned bath includes an oversized lavatory, built-in shower, and a Jacuzzi tub.

The exterior of the hotel was also updated. A wood shake mansard roof was replaced by a light-color, textured parapet. Textured walls replaced old pipe railings on room balconies, and the entire exterior was repainted. Improvements were also made in the landscaping and the swimming pool area, and new signs were installed.

The hotel can provide appropriate meeting rooms for groups from four to 300. Handicapped access has been improved, and 20 percent of the guest rooms are designated for nonsmokers. The \$3-million renovation (of a complex that originally cost one million dollars to build) received an award from the Holiday Inn parent company, which extended the Fairfield unit's franchise for 14 years, four years longer than the usual franchise term.

According to Bill Duncan, the inn's director of sales and marketing, the renovation did not interrupt business. "Our staff had a wonderful attitude during the construction, and the contractor and subcontractors were helpful and sensitive to our needs."

The Fairfield Holiday Inn is well



Above: Several guest rooms are designed specifically for the business traveler, with large, well-lighted work surfaces and extra telephones.

Right: Meeting facilities include an executive-style conference room with media board and serving credenza.



supported by the community. The local Kiwanis, Rotary, Lions, Soroptimist, and the Business & Professional Women's clubs are among the groups who hold their weekly luncheon meetings at the inn, while banquet rooms are frequently booked for receptions, parties, and other special functions. In addition to its more usual business guests, the hotel frequently hosts professional drivers from Sears Point Raceway, and college and high school athletic teams traveling to tournaments.

Regional and state groups, such as the California Women in Chambers of Commerce and the California Federation of Republican Women, Northern Division, are among the groups who have held conventions at the Fairfield Holiday Inn. Because of its central location, the hotel is also a popular site for training seminars for both private firms, such as Pacific Gas and Electric Company, and public agencies, such as the Department of Transportation.

Bill Yarbrough and Jerry Lane dis-

solved their partnership in 1980. Yarbrough and his wife, Louise, are the principals of B&L Properties, which now owns the Holiday Inn, along with other properties. Yarbrough ceased his involvement in the construction industry in 1984, but B&L Properties still owns Solano Concrete, which has plants in Vacaville, Fairfield, and Cordelia, and a rock and asphalt plant in Madison.

Yarbrough finally did get back to Oklahoma, where he started buying ranches in 1978. He now owns four ranches: the Ada, with 6,240 acres; the Atwood, 402 acres; the Seminole, 784 acres; and the Shawnee, 1,220 acres. The ranches are home to some 2,200 head of Angus cows and calves. Yarbrough believes that a good breeding operation requires a

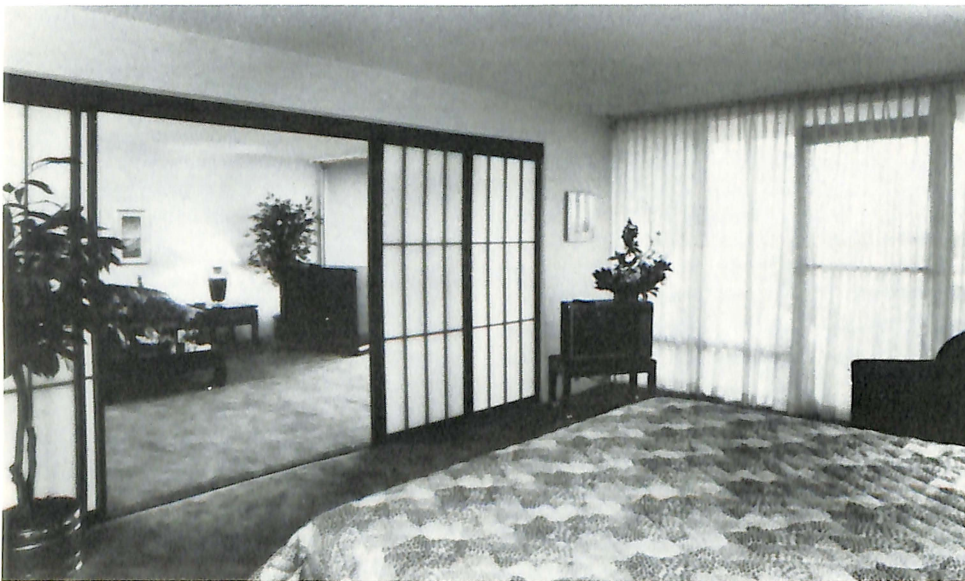
personal touch and spends about one week each month in Oklahoma overseeing the ranches. He boasts that his Holiday Inn "serves the best there is—'Certified Angus Steak'" from his own ranches.

Another Yarbrough project is the restoration of a 12,000-square-foot house, the Grisso mansion, built in the late 1920s. Yarbrough bought the mansion in 1987, and says the building, originally financed with oil money, is full of history.

The Yarbroughs have three children—Karen, Debbie, and



Above: The interior renovation included a complete change of decor in the restaurant.



Left: The executive suite, twice the size of regular guest rooms, includes such amenities as a built-in bar and a Jacuzzi tub.

Scott—and five grandchildren.

Brock Hotel Corporation, which has managed the Holiday Inn since its opening, was founded by Robert Brock. In past years the firm has operated as many as 65 Holiday Inns, but today manages 39 hotels of various brands, and restaurants, including Chuck E. Cheese, Showbiz Pizza, and Monterey House of Texas. When Brock sold his share of the business in May 1988, Tom Corcoran became president of the company. Now called Integra, the operation is a publicly held corporation with stock traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

The Fairfield Holiday Inn has

had many general managers through the years because of Integra's policy of transferring its managers frequently. Among the hotel's managers have been Robert Brock, Jr., in 1982, and Alan Lundstrom, who has managed the Fairfield hotel twice, in 1981 and again in 1986. Most recently, in the fall of 1988, Kyle Scott succeeded Keith Rademaker as general manager.

The Holiday Inn management are strong supporters of local civic activities. The hotel is a member firm of the Fairfield-Suisun Chamber of Commerce, and Bill Duncan heads the chamber's tourism committee. The hotel plays an active part in the

annual United Way campaign and is a strong supporter of the Northern Solano Theater Foundation, which seeks to create a performing arts center in the Fairfield area.

The Holiday Inn also participates in Toys for Tots and the Salvation Army Christmas for the Needy, has served complimentary Thanksgiving dinners for abused and battered children, and provided emergency housing for victims of the 1985 floods.

The hotel also co-sponsors several programs, including the Home of the Month contest with the Travis Air Force Base Family Services Division, and Families Helping Families with Anheuser-Busch. In addition, the Holiday Inn supports the Solano County Sheriffs' Association's Say No to Drugs substance-abuse education program in the county's schools.

Bill Yarbrough is active personally with the National Junior Angus Association, which he sees as a necessary tool in helping to keep young people interested in ranching. The association, with members ranging in age from six years to college age, is affil-

iated with Future Farmers of America.

The Fairfield area's growth has brought considerable change to the land surrounding the Holiday Inn. When the hotel was built, there was not much development on the west side of Interstate 80, and only a few houses to the hotel's west and

When the demand for small meeting facilities increased, the hotel developed multipurpose rooms.



north. Opposite the hotel, on the east side of the freeway, were pear orchards. Today the same area contains a shopping center, a restaurant, and a car dealership, and there are some 200 homes to the west and north of the hotel.

Both Yarbrough and Duncan foresee nothing but success in the future of the Holiday Inn of Fairfield. "The pressure is on to grow in the Bay Area, and Fairfield is right in the path of that growth," says Yarbrough. The Holiday Inn remains the only full-service hotel in Fairfield and Solano County, and the possible future construction of a convention

No function is too difficult for the Holiday Inn staff to attempt.

center in the area can only bring more business.

Yarbrough believes that Holiday Inn is one of the top franchises in the nation today. With 1,600 units, including Holiday Inns, Harrah's, Crowne Plazas, Hampton Inns, and Embassy Suites, the company is the largest hotel and motel chain in the United States. The chain name also contributes a great deal to the success of the Fairfield Hotel. "We are a leader in Fairfield, and Holiday



Billy and Louis Yarbrough at the B&L Ball, 1988.

Inn's extension of our franchise to (the year) 2001 shows confidence in our future."

Duncan is equally enthusiastic. "The Holiday Inn in Fairfield is a flagship property of Integra," he says. "This is a good location, and Yarbrough's Holiday Inn is a leader. We expect it to remain one of our top properties."



"QUICK 95" KUIC 95.3 FM

KUIC, the only radio station in the Vacaville-Fairfield area, was established in 1969 by Bruce Zieminsky. Originally known as KVFS, the operation began with less than five employees. During its first few years KVFS experimented with several different formats, finally settling on an adult contemporary repertoire in 1975.

KVFS became KUIC in 1972. The station became the property of Quick Broadcasting, Inc., 10 years later. The station had 17 employees when Quick Broadcasting took over. Since that time the number of station employees has nearly doubled. "We're not run like a small-town radio station," says Andy Santamaria, president and general manager. "We hire good talent, and operate like a major market radio station."

Santamaria is particularly proud

Shown here is disc jockey Thaddeus Kay. KUIC has a music-based format with award-winning news coverage.



of KUIC's news operation. KUIC is one of just a few smaller market stations with a music-based format in the country with three full-time newspeople, and has collected numerous awards for its news coverage. KUIC has received merit awards from the Associated Press regularly for the past 10 years, and in 1988 received AP's

Located in KUIC Plaza in Vacaville, KUIC is the only radio station in the Vacaville-Fairfield area.

highest honor, The Mark Twain Award, for the best newscast in California for stations with five or fewer newspeople.

The station has also received an award from the governor's office for exceptional service during the 1985 floods, and has received several citations from local police departments for its assistance in emergency situations.

In 1988 KUIC vacated its old facilities and moved to new quarters at Davis and East Main in Vacaville. The radio station occupies most of the second floor at KUIC Plaza, while the lower floor is leased to other businesses.

KUIC is active in supporting community organizations. The station belongs to both the Vacaville and Fairfield-Suisun chambers of commerce.

KUIC's aim, according to Santamaria, is for its listeners to feel that they're not missing anything by choosing their local station. He believes the station's music and news mix is helping it to achieve that goal.



VALLEJO TIMES-HERALD

The precursor to today's Vallejo *Times-Herald*, the *Solano Daily Times*, made its appearance on September 28, 1875. The newspaper offered its readers a paper every morning except Monday "delivered by carriers anywhere in the city at 12.5 cents cost per week, or sent by mail to subscribers at five dollars per year, invariably in advance." Within two weeks the publishers, George Roe and Will F. Walsh, announced the publication of a weekly paper, the *Solano Weekly Times*, designed "for circulation in the interior among those who are not conveniently located for a daily paper." The *Weekly Times* was offered for one year at \$2.50 or six months for \$1.50.

During the 1870s the *Daily Times* typically consisted of a double-sheet, eight-page issue, with short

stories, sketches, and jokes on the first page. News articles began on page two, along with numerous small advertisements.

The modern *Times-Herald* came into being with the arrival in Vallejo of Luther E. Gibson, a Santa Cruz native who had operated a small printing plant in his hometown. He came to town at the request of an old friend and former apprentice, Kenneth F. Knight, who published the weekly *Mare Island Employee*. Knight had had problems arranging to have his publication printed, and thought Vallejo ripe for the establishment of a local printing plant.

With printing equipment acquired from the recently defunct *Anti-och Tribune*, Gibson, Knight, and two other partners began printing the *Mare Island Employee* in 1919. They soon decided that the existing

Vallejo newspapers, the *Chronicle*, the *News*, and the *Times*, by then all evening publications, could use some competition in the morning. The *Morning Herald* was launched on January 4, 1922, with the slogan "So The People May Know!"

Within four months Gibson and his partners purchased the *Evening Times* and merged it with the *Herald* to create the *Vallejo Times-Herald*. Gradually Gibson bought out his partners and acquired the other two Vallejo papers, as well as the *Benicia Herald* and the *Morning News-Gazette* in Martinez.

In April 1946 the newspaper survived a disastrous fire that destroyed both the editorial offices and the printing plant, as well as a 130-ton shipment of newsprint that had just arrived. With the cooperation of the *Richmond Independent*, which offered the use of its presses, the *Times-Herald* delivered the next morning's paper on time, maintaining its record of never missing an edition.

Gibson, who served as a state senator from 1948 to 1968, sold the *Times-Herald* to the Donrey Media Group in 1974. Donrey, which owns newspapers, radio and television stations, and outdoor advertising companies in 10 states, brought Dave Caffoe to Vallejo as general manager. Caffoe retired in 1981 and was succeeded by Jimmie Jones, who had begun his career at the *Times-Herald* in 1956 as a copy boy.

In 1986 the *Vallejo Times-Herald* moved to a new 32,000-square-foot building. A new nine-unit Urbanite printing press allows the paper to do all its printing on site. With its circulation of 27,500, the *Times-Herald* concentrates primarily on serving the communities of Vallejo and Benicia.



In 1912 the Vallejo Times occupied a building on Marin Street. The paper later was merged with the *Morning Herald*.

PATRONS

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Automatic Bar Controls, Inc.*
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 "Quick 95" KUIC 95.3 FM*
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 Solano County Office of Education*
 Ticor Title Insurance*
 Vallejo Times-Herald*
 Cal Yee Farms*

*Partners in Progress of *Solano: The Crossroads County*. The histories of these companies and organizations appear in Chapter 9, beginning on page 103.

This lovely Dixon equestrienne was captured on film sometime around 1900. Courtesy, Dixon Public Library



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Mr. M. Clyde Low of Green Valley representing the Solano Community College, with Dr. Marjorie K. Blaha of Green Valley acting as alternate.

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The land called Solano was
once an important crossroads
in the American search
for destiny. It is now the end
of the journey.

FRONT COVER: Citizens assembled
for this parade at the corner of Marin
and Georgia streets in Vallejo around
1875. Notice the policemen's uniforms
and the clothing of the men, women and
children. The flags would indicate it
was probably a Fourth of July parade.
Courtesy, Ernest Wichels Collection

ABOVE: This highly colorful seal of So-
lano County reflects the major commer-
cial and historical aspects of Solano
County. As most of Solano County is
ringed by water, the seal is ringed by a
life preserver. Courtesy, County of So-
lano

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